



Settlement of Newcomers to Canada

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS

CANADIAN Social Work

Vol. 12 (1) • Fall 2010

Canadian Social Work

Volume 12 (2) Fall 2010

CSW Editor: Colleen Lundy
Guest Editors: John Biles, Glenn Drover,
Meredith Henley, Humera Ibrahim,
Miu Chung Yan

Resources Editor: Eugenia Repetur Moreno

Project Manager: Leila S. Goldberger

Graphic Design: Llama Communications

Canadian Social Work
383 Parkdale Avenue, Suite 402
Ottawa ON K1Y 4R4
Tel.: 613-729-6668 Fax: 613-729-9608
E-mail: casw@casw-acts.ca

Published by the Canadian Association of Social Workers
ISSN 1488-0318

Note: Please note that all articles were drafted in English, with the exception of Stéphanie Arsenault's article, which was initially written in French.

Notice: *Canadian Social Work*, the official journal of the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW), reaches social workers throughout Canada and beyond. The journal is published online annually in October. Where appropriate, a special issue or an additional issue is published. *Canadian Social Work* is indexed with *Social Work Abstracts*, *Social Services Abstracts*, *CBCA Complete*, and *CBCA Reference*.

Subscriptions: 2011 subscription rates for non-members are \$52.00 + HST in Canada, and \$64.00 (US) funds for the US and overseas.

IP Access Subscriptions: Year 2011 subscription rates for Canadian Social Work IP Access, including rolling year privileges, are \$225.00 + HST in Canada and \$285.00 (US) funds for the US and overseas.

Editorial Policy of the CASW Journal

Canadian Social Work (CSW), the official journal of the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW), is published electronically by the CASW in October of each year.

Articles (2,500 to 5,000 words) submitted for publication in the journal are anonymously peer reviewed by Editorial Board members and other selected reviewers. The viewpoints of authors or advertisers are not necessarily those of CASW or the Editorial Board.

The goals of the Journal are:

1. To provide a national forum in which Canadian social workers can share practice knowledge, research and skills, and debate contemporary social work concerns;
2. To stimulate discussion of national and regional social policy issues;
3. To promote exchange between: social workers in different regions and language groups in Canada, the CASW and its member organizations, and Canadian and international social work communities; and
4. To share information about social work educational resources—books, films, videos, conferences and workshops.

Submissions

Articles can be submitted in either French or English and, if accepted, will be published in the language in which they are received, with an abstract in the other official language. An information package for prospective writers is available on the CASW website and is free upon request.

Articles previously published in one CASW official language may be accepted in the other official language for possible publication in the CSW with the approval of the Editorial Board in exceptional circumstances, as defined by the Editorial Board (for example, due to its major contribution to the social work profession).

Articles in this category will be subject to peer review as per the CSW policy and, if approved for publication, will appear in the CSW Journal with a note making reference to previous publication and stating copyright permission. CASW will not take responsibility for costs associated with copyright.

For further information, write to:

CASW Journal
383 Parkdale Avenue
Suite 402, Ottawa ON K1Y 4R4
Tel.: 613-729-6668 Fax: 613-729-9608
E-mail: casw@casw-acts.ca
Website: www.casw-acts.ca

Table of Contents

- 4 Preface
Colleen Lundy
- 5 Introduction
John Biles • Glenn Drover • Meredith Henley • Humera Ibrahim • Colleen Lundy • Miu Chung Yan
- 16 Are Social Workers Ready to Work with Newcomers?
Miu Chung Yan • Sherman Chan
- 24 Challenges Faced by Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Newcomers: Implications for Services
Brian O'Neill
- 32 Working from Within Endemic HIV Stigma: Developing Canadian Social Workers' Understanding of the Challenges Faced by Newcomers Managing HIV
Laura M. Bisailon
- 45 Citizenship and Access: Precarious Experiences Within Canada
Susan Madore
- 51 Precarious Migratory Status in Canada: Implications for Social Work and Social Service Delivery
Rupaleem Bhuyan • Tracy Smith-Carrier
- 61 Some Limitations on Intracommunity Relations Among Colombian Refugees: Suggestions for Intervention with Refugees from Conflict Countries
Stéphanie Arsenault
- 67 Unaccompanied Refugee Children in Canada: Experiences of Flight and Resettlement
Myriam Denov • Catherine Bryan
- 76 War and Partner Violence: Refugee Women's Experiences and Impacts on Resettlement
Liza Lorenzetti • David Este
- 83 Young Carers in Immigrant Families: An Ignored Population
Grant Charles • Tim Stainton • Sheila Marshall
- 93 "Young, But Older Than 20": Better Practices in Enhancing Access to Services for Newcomer Youth in Toronto
Roxana Salehi
- 101 Walk with Me: Mentoring Young Adult Immigrants
Grace Po-chee Ko
- 107 The Politics of Place: Integrating Iranian Women into Canadian Graduate Institutions
Zahra Hojati
- 114 Chinese Immigrant Youth and the Justice System in Canada
Siu-Ming Kwok • Dora Mei-ying Tam
- 123 Wounds of the Gut, Wounds of the Soul: Youth Violence and Community Healing Among Oromos in Toronto
Martha Kuwee Kumsa
- 131 A Social Worker's Role in Recognizing Prior Learning (RPL) as a Mechanism to Help Strengthen the Labour Supply
Alicia Sutton
- 137 Approaches to Portfolio Development and Applications for Immigrants in a Social Work Context
Stephen J. Sutherland • Dianne Conrad • Mark S. Wheller • Tej Wadhwa
- 145 "Canadian Experience," Employment Challenges, and Skilled Immigrants: A Close Look Through "Tacit Knowledge"
Izumi Sakamoto • Matthew Chin • Melina Young
- 152 A Sociocultural Perspective of Mental Health Service Use by Chinese Immigrants
Lin Fang
- 161 Are Current Employment Services Meeting the Needs of Immigrants? A Recent Look
Wendy Cukier • Katherine Jeffery • Margaret Yap • Lauren McDonald • Lennie Lejasisaks • Diversity Institute in Management and Technology, Ryerson University
- 170 A Place-based Approach to Social Integration: How a Neighbourhood House Works with Newcomers
Karen Larcombe • Miu Chung Yan
- 176 Growing New Roots: The Housing Experiences of Racialized Newcomers in a Second-tier Canadian City
Uzo Anucha • Alexander Lovell • Daphne Jeyapal
- 184 Building Bridges: Exploring Newcomer Settlement and Integration Supports in Brantford and the Counties of Brant, Haldimand and Norfolk Using Community-based Participatory Research (CBPR)
Bharati Sethi
- 192 Safe Havens? Mapping Settlement Services in Three Canadian Urban Centres
Susan McGrath • Patricia Burke Wood • Julie E. E. Young
- 200 Integration of Newcomers to Newfoundland and Labrador: Barriers and Challenges
Lan Gien • Rebecca Law
- 210 The Religious Congregation as Partner in Refugee Resettlement: An Overview of Theory and Practice for Social Workers
Nicole Ives • Jill Witmer Sinha
- 218 Settlement Experiences in a Small City: Voices of Family-class Immigrants, and of Settlement Workers
Julie Drolet • Jeanette Robertson • Wendy Robinson
- 224 *Social Work and Migration: Immigrant and Refugee Settlement and Integration.* By Kathleen Valtonen. Surrey: Ashgate, 2008, xiv + 218 pages
Reviewed by Colleen Lundy

Preface

Colleen Lundy

The Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) is pleased to publish a special issue on policy and settlement practice with immigrants and refugees in the *Canadian Social Work* (CSW) journal. Founded in 1926, the CASW is the national voice for over 15,000 social workers in Canada and has a long history of responding to the needs of newcomers and settlement services.

As editor of the *CSW* journal for this special issue, I welcome five guest editors who bring expertise in the area of immigration and refugee policy and practice. To our knowledge, this is the first social work journal to dedicate an issue to this important area.

Social work is considered to be “a singular vehicle for carrying out critical human service interventions for the well-being and welfare of this client constituency of ‘newcomers’ or ‘newer citizens’ ” (Valtonen, 2008, 15). Immigrants are now the driving force of Canadian population growth. With more than 230,000 newcomers coming to Canada annually, we are approaching a new reality: that 22% of the total Canadian population are foreign-born.

Although social workers have been working diligently towards culturally sensitive service, the predicaments and challenges that immigrants and refugees face are beyond cultural or racial discrimination. These newcomers enter Canada under various immigration and refugee policies that structurally impact their life chances in different ways and at different levels. The challenges of refugee and immigrant settlement require a comprehensive response, and social workers are well positioned to provide one.

This collection of articles will raise awareness—within the social work profession, contribute to knowledge and skills for practice, and promote the roles and functions of social work among the policy makers and practitioners in the field of immigrant and refugee settlement.

Introduction

**John Biles • Glenn Drover • Meredith Henley •
Humera Ibrahim • Colleen Lundy • Miu Chung Yan**

The Canadian population is extremely diverse and recent Statistics Canada demographic projections suggest that not only will this continue to be the case, but that this diversity will deepen with augmented religious pluralism, and will increasingly spread across the country. The extraordinary concentrations of newcomers and visible minorities will continue to be evident in Montréal, Toronto and Vancouver, but will be joined by Calgary, Ottawa, Windsor, Kitchener, Hamilton, Guelph, Winnipeg, London, and Edmonton, which will all have a higher share of newcomers than the 2006 Canadian average of 19.8% by 2031. Proportionally large gains are also anticipated in Sherbrooke, Halifax and Québec City. Even more surprising, in 33 out of 34 Census Metropolitan Areas covered by the projections study (all save Saguenay), the proportion of the population reporting visible minority status will grow significantly.

By 2031, roughly 30% of the Canadian population will likely be a visible minority, with 36% of those under 15 years of age. Among these, Canadians of Chinese and South Asian origins will predominate. Canadians reporting religious affiliations other than Christian will double by 2031, with the plurality of these Canadians declaring an affiliation with Islam. The percentage of the population whose mother tongue is neither English nor French will also increase by half so that by 2031, the mother tongue of roughly 30% of the Canadian population will not be an official language (Statistics Canada, 2010).

The result of this increasing diversity is that the clients served by Canadian social workers will continue to diversify. In addition to an ability to address the needs and concerns of minority clients, social workers must become conversant with the range of contexts and issues that are faced by the heterogeneous populations often subsumed under the label of “newcomer.” This rich collection of articles provides an overview of this changing clientele and the

diverse challenges they face as well as providing a rich resource to both better understand the contexts of potential clients, but also the kinds of resources that are available to social workers and their clients.

The collection begins appropriately enough with an article by Miu Chung Yan and Sherman Chan. Appropriate both because they were the individuals who initially pitched the idea for this special issue, and because it sets the stage for everything that follows. Their article reports the findings of an exploratory survey conducted on a group of self-selected members of the British Columbia Association of Social Workers about their perception of their state of readiness to serve newcomers. The findings signal that the social work profession may be less than fully prepared to serve newcomers effectively.

Indeed, a quick scan of Canadian social work literature supports this conclusion. To the extent that diversity has been featured in social work volumes in Canada, it has been primarily through a multicultural lens (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2003; Lie & Este, 1999;

Herberg, 1993), albeit with some contributions in these collections that did focus on newcomers. There is no Canadian equivalent of Poticky-Tripodi's (2002) American volume, *Best Practices for Social Work with Refugees and Immigrants*, or Valtonen's international volume (2008), *Social Work and Migration: Immigrant and Refugee Settlement and Integration*, which focus explicitly on the challenges unique to those who have recently arrived. George, Doyle and Chaze's *Immigration and Settlement in Canada* (2007), while a general treatment of settlement and immigration, was aimed specifically at social workers.

Canadians such as child welfare advocate J.J. Kelso and William Lyon MacKenzie King, future Prime Minister of Canada, were among its many visitors (Jennissen & Lundy, 2011). Between 1891 and 1910, settlement houses in the US quickly grew from 6 to over 400, prompting the establishment of the National Federation of Settlement Houses in 1911 (Davis 1967). By 1920 there were at least 13 settlement houses in Canada (Allen 1971). Settlement workers, influenced by the radical social gospel, often lived in the communities and referred to the recipients of their services as "neighbours in need" (Lundblad, 1995). In Canada, settlement houses were often affiliated with universities. Harry Cassidy, a social work educator, played an instrumental role in establishing the University Settlement house in Toronto to serve the immigrant population in the Kensington Market area (Irving, Parsons & Bellamy, 1995).

Despite this long history, there is a notable scarcity of social work research focused explicitly on newcomers to Canada and the specific challenges they may face. It is this lacunæ that this special issue seeks to address. This collection is the result of a call for proposals issued in winter 2010. It contains a wide range of articles covering much ground, although we should be clear that it is far from a comprehensive survey. The articles are organized in four thematic areas: specific sub-populations of newcomers; sectoral or specific challenges faced by newcomers; settlement services; and the geography or locales where newcomers settle and the range of potential partners available to facilitate settlement and integration.

Of course *newcomer* is itself an umbrella term that lumps together an extremely diverse group of Canadians or soon-to be Canadians. There are not only sub-divisions based on country of origin, and those other aspects of human diversity (age, gender,

Despite this long history, there is a notable scarcity of social work research focused explicitly on newcomers to Canada and the specific challenges they may face. It is this lacunæ that this special issue seeks to address.



This gap in Canadian social work literature is surprising given the long history of serving newcomers inherited from social work's Settlement House tradition (Trolander 1987). Inspired by Toynbee Hall, the first settlement house in the immigrant-concentrated impoverished East London, Jane Addams, a social work advocate for peace and social justice, established the Hull House in Chicago in 1889 to serve mainly immigrant communities. Hull House grew to include 26 apartments and 27 rooms covering two city blocks (Trolander 1975).

ability, and sexual orientation, amongst others), but also categories analogous with immigration status, which are uniquely important to newcomers to Canada. Without understanding these statuses and what they do, or do not entail, social workers run the risk of harming the best interests of their clients.¹

Box 1 provides an illustrative list of categories that have surfaced as a result of official immigration policy, for purposes of academic study, as well as in day-to-day reference to an expanding newcomer population or through self-identification among newcomer populations.

Theme 1: Populations

The present collection contains 10 articles on particularly vulnerable populations. For example, Brian O'Neill provides an article that describes a qualitative study of the perceptions of 6 Lesbian, Gay and/or Bisexual newcomers and 18 settlement service workers regarding challenges faced by LGB newcomers and issues relevant to serving these populations. The study highlights the importance of social workers understanding newcomers' values and practices in relation to same-sex sexual orientation, needs for safety and acceptance of LGB people within immigrant communities as well the welcoming of newcomers into mainstream LGB communities.

Three articles in this collection focus on refugees. One focuses on the experiences of Columbian refugees in Quebec (Arsenault), another focuses on unaccompanied refugee children (Denov & Bryan) and yet another, on refugee women and partner violence (Lorenzetti & Este). The first draws on interviews with 42 Columbian refugees in 3 Quebec cities to explore the extent to which a transnational group identity exists and is helpful to settlement. The second draws on in-depth interviews and focus groups with 16 unaccompanied children, highlighting their experiences, perspectives and the

Box 1

Examples of Immigration Categories

- Immigrant
- Economic immigrant
- Skilled worker
- Business class immigrant
- Investor, entrepreneur, self-employed immigrant
- Family class immigrant
- Principal applicant
- Dependent
- Undocumented worker
- Temporary foreign worker
- Domestic worker
- Live-in caregiver
- International student
- Provincial nominee
- Refugee
- Sponsored refugee
- Government-assisted refugee
- Convention refugee
- Asylum refugee
- Protected person
- Unaccompanied refugee children

challenges they face with regard to flight and resettlement. The third touches on an area that has been under-attended in Canada, with some exceptions such as Agnew's 1998 *In Search of a Safe Place: Abused Women and Culturally Sensitive Services*. It analyzes interviews with five refugee women, exploring the impact of state and/or partner violence on the participants. Insights focus on the nature of the violence experienced, and how this impacted the women throughout the migration process, including resettlement in Canada.

Related, and in some senses overlapping with the cluster of articles on refugees, are two other clusters: one with four articles that focus on children and youth, and a trio of articles on newcomers with precarious status in Canada. The challenges faced by both populations are considered to be poorly understood in current academic debates

across a wide range of disciplines, including social work.

There has long been a concern with newcomers to Canada who are deemed to be in precarious status—those who have entered the country illegally, those awaiting an in-land refugee determination, those who have overstayed their visas, or those who have fallen out of status as a result of violence or threatened violence. With the recent significant increase in temporary foreign workers admitted to Canada (numbers quadrupled between 1980 and 2006 from 39,234 to 171,844), concern with this population has grown.



The four articles on youth included in this issue address young carers (Charles, Stainton & Marshall), youth access to services (Salehi), mentoring young adult immigrants (Ko), and female graduate students (Hojati). They contribute to a growing literature on youth from newcomer families in Canada (Wilkinson 2008, Yan, Lauer & Jhangiani, in press; Anisef & Kilbride, 2003; Aldous, 1999).

The first article reports the findings of a qualitative retrospective study that explored the experiences of young carers within immigrant families. The second draws upon relevant literature, the author’s personal experience working with newcomer youth, and results from a community-based project, Toronto Teen Survey, to focus on three issues that influence access to services for newcomer adolescents: language and interpretation, confidentiality, and legal status. Ko reports on a pilot mentoring program among ethnic Chinese in Vancouver, which aims to empower well adjusted mid-life immigrants to intentionally walk with young adult immigrants for a crucial period of their life transition. Hojati’s article draws on an ongoing research project focused on Iranian immigrant women graduate students as part of Middle Eastern people who are studying in Canadian graduate schools. It attempts to provide an opportunity for policy makers and social workers to understand international graduate students’ experience at a time when the numbers of international students are continuing to climb and are viewed as another potential pool of future citizens of Canada.

Children and youth who arrive themselves as immigrants (either the so-called first generation who arrived young, or the 1.5 generation who arrived as youth), and those who are children of immigrant parents (second-generation Canadians) have unique experiences that must be understood to effectively assist them.² From a policy perspective, the outcomes for second-generation youth are also considered to be one of the most important indicators of whether longer-term integration of newcomers is occurring as anticipated.

There has long been a concern with newcomers to Canada who are deemed to be in precarious status—those who have entered the country illegally, those awaiting an in-land refugee determination, those who have overstayed their visas, or those who have fallen out of status as a result of violence or threatened violence. With the recent significant increase in temporary foreign workers admitted to Canada (numbers

quadrupled between 1980 and 2006 from 39,234 to 171,844), concern with this population has grown. In particular, concerns have been increasingly raised with regards to the ability of these individuals to access public services and the long-term impact on their integration if they remain in Canada (Goldring, Berinstein & Bernhard, 2007).

To date, the Government of Canada has taken some steps to mitigate the potential impacts of precarious status. For example, since 2007 the Government of Canada has issued temporary residence permits to victims of trafficking to provide temporary legal status in Canada for 180 days, in order to escape the influence of their traffickers and access needed services, medical or otherwise. The temporary residence permits provide victims with a period of reflection to consider their options, including whether they want to remain in Canada, return to their country of origin, or whether assist in any investigation or prosecution of their trafficker. Another example includes allowing temporary foreign workers, especially live-in caregivers, the right to switch employers within a short timeframe to escape abusive employers.³ Despite these policy changes, the range of potential precarious situations is quite extensive and a social worker seeking to assist someone whose status is precarious should be aware both of these variations and the policies that might apply and the appropriate agencies to consult before making recommendations that might be detrimental to their clients.

In this special issue, we have three articles that touch on newcomers with precarious status—one is focused on newcomers with HIV (Bisaillon), a second one focuses explicitly on the impact of precarious status on social work and social service delivery in Canada (Bhuyan & Smith-Carrier), and a third explores the perils faced by those in Canada without status (Madore). All three focus directly on ramifications for social workers. Madore reflects on the widest

range of newcomers who find themselves in precarious status and the general observations that are of import to social workers, while the other two focus on more targeted populations.

The range of potential precarious situations is quite extensive and a social worker seeking to assist someone whose status is precarious should be aware both of these variations and the policies that might apply and the appropriate agencies to consult before making recommendations that might be detrimental to their clients.

While the population covered by Bisaillon is not, technically speaking, in the same category, as their immigration status is secured, there is nevertheless fear of stigma. This is heightened by the fact the two grounds of inadmissibility to Canada are health and security, and while those with HIV can be admitted, they are encouraged to seek medical assistance.⁴ This article is informed by field research and social work practice with newcomers in three Canadian cities.

Meanwhile, the Bhuyan and Smith-Carrier article draws on a larger study to explore the construction of social rights in public policy and social service delivery. For this article, they highlight findings from interviews with service providers who work with a particularly

vulnerable group of migrants women seeking shelter from domestic violence.

While the open call for proposals we used for this special issue generated an extremely rich collection, it did not yield any accepted articles on newcomer seniors. This may be due, in part, to the fact that the bulk of the cutting-edge research is covered in a forthcoming volume edited by Doug Durst.⁵ While awaiting that volume, those interested in the subject may wish to consult the chapter on immigrant seniors included in Statistics Canada’s *A Portrait of Seniors in Canada* (2007).

Theme 2: Sectoral/Specific Challenges

In addition to articles that focus on specific populations, we also have a number of articles that focus on specific sectors or specific challenges faced by newcomers. The articles provide a focus on interactions of Chinese-origin youth with the justice system (Kwok & Tam), youth violence (Kumsa) recognizing prior learning (Sutton; Sutherland et. al.), the importance of Canadian work experience (Sakamoto) and mental health concerns of Chinese newcomers (Fang).

The articles represent a diverse range of sources and research methods. Fang, Sutton, Sutherland et. al. draw on reviews of the literature, while the other three utilize a range of qualitative research methods. Kwok and Tam present part of the findings of a qualitative study relating to the experience of 36 Chinese immigrant youth in the Canadian criminal justice system. Sakamoto’s article on Canadian work experience draws on data from semi-structured interviews with skilled immigrants looking for employment, their service providers and mentors as well as Human Resources personnel; arts-based focus groups with job-seeking skilled immigrants, their mentors and service providers; participant observation in job search workshops and bridging programs; as well

as archival research. Kumsa tells the stories of a community-initiated and youth-led participatory action research project which was designed and carried out in the Oromo community of Toronto.

In addition to articles that focus on specific populations, we also have a number of articles that focus on specific sectors or specific challenges faced by newcomers. The articles provide a focus on interactions of Chinese-origin youth with the justice system, youth violence, recognizing prior learning, the importance of Canadian work experience and mental health concerns of Chinese newcomers.



Theme 3: Settlement Services

Citizenship and Immigration Canada spends nearly \$1 billion a year on the provision of settlement services to newcomers in Canada (Andrew et. al., 2010; Biles et. al., 2010, Biles, 2008). In addition, many other players are involved in the provision of settlement services to newcomers, such as provincial and territorial government agencies, non-governmental organizations or religious groups, as well as employers and union groups. Social workers would be well advised to tap into these local resources.⁶

The increasing scope of settlement services as well as the expanding range of

Service providers can now work within a singular program and funding structure to combine activities and meet multiple objectives that reflect the multifaceted and diverse newcomer settlement experiences. This transformation opens the door not only to a greater diversity of services available to meet newcomer needs, but also to a wider range of partners and new ways of working together to achieve an integrated society.



players involved has prompted a re-imagining of how settlement services are best provided. In 2008, CIC introduced a “modernized approach” to newcomer settlement and integration through new terms and conditions for the federal Settlement Program. This modernized approach offers three key transformations: greater flexibility, results-oriented programming, and improved planning and coordination. The Settlement Program combines previously separate programs—the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC), the Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program (ISAP), and the Host Program—into a single program with multiple and interdependent objectives. Expected results of the program include *orientation* of newcomers; development of

English or French *language* ability as well as other necessary *skills*; access to and participation in the *labour market*; the establishment of *welcoming communities*; as well as improved *policy and program development* for the Program itself. Service providers can now work within a singular program and funding structure to combine activities and meet multiple objectives that reflect the multifaceted and diverse newcomer settlement experiences. This transformation opens the door not only to a greater diversity of services available to meet newcomer needs, but also to a wider range of partners and new ways of working together to achieve an integrated society (Smith, 2010).

A third grouping of articles focuses on some of these settlement services, including employment services (Cukier et. al.), services offered through a neighbourhood house in Vancouver (Lacombe & Yan), and access to housing (Anucha). The articles in this thematic area contribute to a small field of research that explores settlement service providers and the work they undertake (Agnew, 1998; Holder, 1998; George & Michalski, 1996; Beyene et. al., 1996; Iglehart & Becerra, 1995; Pal, 1995; Burnaby & Cumming, 1992; Neuwirth, 1991; Hawkins, 1988; and Yelaja, 1988). Like the other thematic groupings, this one deploys a range of methodologies.

On the quantitative side, Cukier et. al. draw data from a recently conducted immigrant labour market survey (1,400 newcomers in Peel) which details employment service provision and provides analysis broken down by education level, gender, immigration category, and age.

More qualitatively, Anucha draws on interviews with 20 racialized newcomers purposively selected out of 204 participants from a larger housing survey in Windsor-Essex. The interviews illuminate the housing experiences of newcomers and the processes that facilitate, hinder or obstruct their

access to housing. Lacombe and Yan offer a snapshot of the contributions of neighbourhood houses in helping newcomers face the daunting challenges as they first settle and eventually integrate into Canadian life.

Young), Newfoundland and Labrador (Gien), the potential role of religious congregations (Ives), and services available in small cities (Drolet et. al.).

A number of these articles focus on services available in communities with high concentrations of newcomers. For example, Sethi presents findings from a Community-based participatory research (CBPR) collaboration with the Immigrant Settlement Transition and Employment (ISTEP) committee in Brantford, Ontario—a newcomer task force. Data were gathered from 212 newcomers and 237 service providers and from numerous consultations and reflexive journals. Her article explores five areas of settlement support: education, training, employment, health, and social support.

McGrath, Wood and Young compare and contrast the different service-provision models of settlement agencies in Calgary, Toronto, and Montréal. As these sites of the study exist in three different federal-provincial arrangements in terms of the provision of settlement services, it provides a valuable contribution to a nascent field of research (Andrew et. al., 2010; Seidle, 2010; Good, 2009; Leo & August, 2009).

Other articles focus on communities with fewer newcomers. For example, Gien focuses on the results of a study involving 50 newcomers in Newfoundland and Labrador who completed a structured questionnaire with some open-ended questions, presented online or in face-to-face interviews. Similarly, Drolet et. al. contribute an article based on research findings from a community-based study that investigates the settlement experiences of family class immigrants in a small Canadian city, located in Kamloops, British Columbia. They employed a mixed method research design blending key informant interviews, focus groups, and photo-voice research methods.

A final article in this thematic grouping explores the role of religious congregations in the resettlement of refugees. While the role of religious organizations has been noted (Biles

The very fact of being new in Canada, and the attendant stresses and strains of the migration process itself—not to mention the difficult waters of the various immigration statuses—means that social workers seeking to assist newcomers need to know more about their particular circumstances in order to help them effectively.



Theme 4: Geography/Partners

A fourth and final set of articles include those focused on the communities in which newcomers live. As we discussed at the outset, these contexts are continuously shifting as newcomers settle in larger numbers in a wider range of communities. The result is a need for social workers to better understand what resources or potential partnering organizations may be available in different kinds of communities.⁷ In this cluster of articles we include those that explore services in Brampton (Sethi), a comparison of settlement services across three cities (McGrath, Wood &

& Ibrahim, 2005), this article is unique in that it builds on the census of nearly 1,400 religious congregations in Philadelphia to analyze how religious organizations can aid in the resettlement of refugees. Preliminary work has been undertaken in Canada on this topic, although nothing as comprehensive as the Philadelphia Census has been attempted yet (Bramadat & Fisher, 2010).

Concluding Thought

After reading this interesting collection of articles replete with their recommendations for social workers, we cannot help but reflect on how the very fact of being new in Canada, and the attendant stresses and strains of the migration process itself—not to mention the difficult waters of the various immigration statuses—means that social workers seeking to assist newcomers need to know more about their particular circumstances in order to help them effectively. It will entail learning about immigration and forging partnerships with those organizations that already provide a wide range of services to newcomers. We hope that this collection will launch many social workers on the path to assisting future new Canadians.

References

- Agnew, V. (1998). *In Search of a Safe Place: Abused Women and Culturally Sensitive Service*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Aldous, J. (1999). Immigrant and refugee children and adolescents: Expanding the vision of possibilities. In G.-Y. Lie & D. Este (Eds.). *Professional Social Service Delivery in a Multicultural World*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press: 49–74.
- Al-Krenawi, A., & Graham, J.R. (Eds.). (2003). *Multicultural Social Work in Canada: Working with Diverse Ethno-racial Communities*. Toronto: Oxford University Press.
- Allen, R. (1971). *The Social Passion*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Andrew, C., Biles, J. Burstein, M., Esses, V., & Tolley, E. (Eds.). (2010). *Integration and Inclusion in Ontario Cities*. McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Anisef, P. & Murphy Kilbride, K. (2003). *Managing Two Worlds*. Canadian Scholars' Press.
- Beyene, D., Butcher, C., Joe, B., & Richmond, T. (1996). Immigrant service agencies: A fundamental component of anti-racist social services. In C. James (Ed.). *Perspectives on Racism and the Human Services Sector: A Case for Change*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press: 171–184.
- Biles, J., Burstein, M., Frideres, J., Tolley, E., & Vineberg, R. (Eds.). (2010). *Integration and Inclusion of Newcomers and Minorities Across Canada*. Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Biles, J. (2008). Integration policies in English-speaking Canada. In J. Biles, M. Burstein & J. Frideres (Eds.) *Immigration and Integration in Canada in the Twenty-first Century*. Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press: 139–186.
- Biles, J., & Ibrahim, H. (2005). Religion and public policy: Immigration, citizenship and multiculturalism—Guess who's coming to dinner. In P. Bramadat & D. Seljak (Eds.). *Religion and Ethnicity in Canada*. Toronto: Pearson Education Canada: 154–177.
- Bramadat, P., & Fisher, S. (2010). Religious Organizations and the Integration of Immigrants, Refugees, and Temporary Foreign Workers: An Annotated Bibliography and List of Community Organizations. Metropolis British Columbia Working Paper. Retrieved October 14, 2010 from <http://mbc.metropolis.net/assets/uploads/files/wp/2010/WP10-01.pdf>
- Burnaby, B., & Cumming, A. (1992). *Socio-Political Aspects of ESL*. Toronto: OISE Press.
- Burstein, M. (2010). Reconfiguring Settlement and Integration: A Service Provider Strategy for Innovation and Results. Prepared for the Canadian Immigrant Settlement Sector Alliance.
- Canada. Statistics Canada. (2010). *Projections of the Diversity of the Canadian Population 2006 to 2031*. Retrieved June 25, 2010 from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/91-551-x/91-551-x2010001-eng.pdf>
- . Statistics Canada. (2007). *A Portrait of Seniors in Canada*. Retrieved June 28, 2010 from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-519-x/89-519-x2006001-eng.pdf>
- Davis, A.F. (1967). *Spearheads for Reform: the Social Settlements and the Progressive Movement 1890–1914*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Elgersma, S. (2007). Site accessed June 28, 2010 from <http://www2.parl.gc.ca/Content/L0P/ResearchPublications/prb0745-e.pdf>

- George, U., Doyle, R., & Chase, F. (2007). *Immigration and Settlement in Canada*. Booksurge Publishers.
- George, U., & Michalski, J.H. (1996). A Snapshot of Service Delivery in Organizations Serving Immigrants. Final report submitted to Citizenship and Immigration Canada, October.
- Goldring, L., Berinstein, C., & Bernhard, J. (2007). "Institutionalizing Precarious Immigration Status in Canada" CERIS Working Paper #61. Retrieved June 28, 2010, from <http://ceris.metropolis.net/Virtual%20Library/WKPP%20List/WKPP2007/CWP61.pdf>
- Good, K. (2009). *Municipalities and Multiculturalism: The Politics of Immigration in Toronto and Vancouver*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Hawkins, F. (1988). *Canada and Immigration: Public Policy and Public Concern*. Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Herberg, D.C. (1993). *Framework for Cultural and Racial Diversity*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press.
- Holder, B.S. (1998). The Role of Immigrant Serving Organizations in the Canadian Welfare State: A Case Study. PhD Dissertation, University of Toronto.
- Iglehart, A.P. & Becerra, R.M. (1995). *Social Services and the Ethnic Community*. Needham Heights, Massachusetts: Allyn & Bacon.
- Irving, A., Parsons, H., & Bellamy, D. (Eds.). (1995). *Neighbours: Three Social Settlements in Downtown Toronto*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press.
- Jennissen, T., & Lundy, C. (2011). *One Hundred Years of Social Work: A History of the Profession in English Canada, 1900-2000*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.
- Leo, C., & August, M. (2009). The multilevel governance of immigration and settlement: Making deep federalism work. *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 42(2): 491-510.
- Lie, G.-Y., & Este D. (Eds.). (1999). *Professional Social Service Delivery in a Multicultural World*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press.
- Lundblad, K. (1995). Jane Addams and Social Reform: A Role Model for the 1990s. *Social Work*, 40(5) September: 661-669.
- Neuwirth, G. (1991). *The Professionalization of Settlement Work*. INSCAN, 4(4) July: p. 1, 7.
- Pal, L. (1995). *Interests of State: The Politics of Language, Multiculturalism and Feminism in Canada*. Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Potocky-Tripodi, M. (2002). *Best Practices for Social Work with Refugees and Immigrants*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Seidle, L. (2010). The Canada-Ontario Immigration Agreement: Assessment and Options for Renewal. Retrieved June 13, 2010 from <http://www.mowat-centre.ca/pdfs/mowatResearch/12.pdf>
- Smith, A. (2010). CIC's Modernized Approach to Settlement Programming: A Brief Description, 23(3), Winter. Retrieved October 14, 2010 from http://www.carleton.ca/cimss/inscan-e/v23_3e.pdf
- Trolander, J.A. (1987). *Professionalism and Social Change: From the Settlement House Movement to Neighbourhood Centers, 1886 to the Present*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- . (1975). *Settlement Houses and the Great Depression*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
- Valtonen, K. (2008). *Social Work and Migration: Immigrant and Refugee Settlement and Integration*. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing.
- Wilkinson, L. (2008). Labor Market Transitions of Immigrant-Born, Refugee-Born, and Canadian-Born Youth. *Canadian Review of Sociology/Revue canadienne de sociologie*, 45(2), 151-176.
- Yan, M.C., Lauer, S., & Jhangiani, S. (In Press). Catching Up the Bloom: Labour Market Experience of New Generation Youth from Visible Minority Immigrant Family. *Canadian Ethnic Studies/Études ethniques au Canada*.
- Yelaja, S.A. (Ed.). (1988). Proceedings of the Settlement and Integration of New Immigrants to Canada Conference. Faculty of Social Work, Wilfrid Laurier University.

Notes

- ¹ The best source of information is the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* and its accompanying regulations, which evolve on an on-going basis.
- ² For a good collection on the experiences of second-generation Canadians, see *Canadian Diversity*, volume 6:2, Spring 2008.
- ³ For up-to-date information on the Live-in Caregiver Program, please visit <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/work/caregiver/index.asp>
- ⁴ The immigration operational manual pertaining to medical exams specifies the need to issue a notification to all newcomers with HIV, encouraging them to seek medical attention. For more information visit <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/manuals/op/op15-eng.pdf>

- ⁵ Durst, Doug and Michael MacLean (Eds.) *Diversity and Aging Among Immigrant Seniors in Canada: Changing Faces and Greying Temples*. Calgary: Temeron Books Inc., October 2010.
- ⁶ A good starting point for identifying local resources is a visit to <http://www.servicesfornewcomers.cic.gc.ca/>
- ⁷ Two initiatives worthy of note in terms of resources for social workers are the Metropolis Project (www.metropolis.net), especially its Our Diverse Cities series of publications, and the Welcoming Communities Initiative for Ontario communities outside of the Greater Toronto Area (<http://www.welcomingcommunities.ca>).

Biographical notes

John Biles is a special advisor to the Director General of Integration Branch, Citizenship and Immigration Canada. Prior to this assignment he spent more than a decade with the Metropolis Project Secretariat in a variety of positions including many years as the Director of Partnerships and Knowledge Transfer. His areas of research expertise include: citizenship, multiculturalism, settlement and integration policy; religion and public policy; civic/political participation of newcomers and minorities; welcoming communities; and knowledge transfer.

Glenn Drover is a retired professor of social work. He taught at Dalhousie University, McGill University, Carleton University, University of British Columbia (UBC), and City University of Hong Kong. He has written and edited many books and articles on social work, social policy and social welfare. He has been actively involved in social work associations for over 40 years, and is a past president of the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) and vice-president of OAPSW (Ontario Association of Professional Social Workers), now the Ontario Association of Social Workers (OASW). Currently, he is a member of board of the Eastern branch of OASW. Meredith Henley currently works as a senior analyst with the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade but was previously engaged with the Integration Branch at Citizenship and Immigration Canada. Meredith advised on social integration policy, programs and initiatives as part of the

federal Settlement Program and led the Welcoming Communities Initiative, as the department's contribution to Canada's Action Plan Against Racism. Meredith's academic background spans international development, anthropology and Latin American studies, with a particular focus on disaster response.

Humera Ibrahim received her masters in social work from Carleton University and has worked extensively with immigrant and refugee communities, more specifically on issues of settlement and integration, domestic violence, racism, and experiences of second-generation youth. She worked for many years as a research analyst at the Multiculturalism Program, Department of Canadian Heritage, and now works for Health Canada. Over the past ten years, she served as a national board representative for the Canadian Council of Muslim Women and also serves on the board of directors of the Canadian Disaster Child Care Society.

Colleen Lundy is a social professor at Carleton University. Among her publications is a book on the history of social work in Canada (with Therese Jennissen), *One Hundred Years of Social Work: A History of the Profession in English Canada 1900-2000*, Wilfred Laurier Press, 2011, the first complete history of social work in Canada. A second edition of her book, (forthcoming in the fall 2011) *Social Work, Human Rights and Social Justice: A Structural Approach to Practice* makes an important contribution to the understanding of structural social work and a social justice/human rights perspective. Her current research focuses on the history and current realities of social work in the far north (Nunavut, Northwest Territories and the Yukon). She is the editor of *Canadian Social Work*, member of the Board of Accreditation, Canadian Association of Social Work Education, the Canadian North America representative on the International Federation of Social Workers Human Right Commissions, and a member of the General Assembly of the Canadian Federation of the Humanities and Social Sciences, representing the Society for Socialist Studies.

Miu Chung Yan is an associate professor at the University of British Columbia. His major research areas include place-based multiservice organizations, immigrant settlement and integration, youth from immigrant family as well as cross-cultural and antiracist social work practice.

Are Social Workers Ready to Work with Newcomers?

Miu Chung Yan · Sherman Chan

Abstract

Newcomers, who constitute a major driving force of Canadian population growth, face numerous challenges both before and after they reach this country¹. The unique status of “being new to Canada” that is reserved to immigrants and refugees has received insufficient attention in the social work profession; the racial and cultural backgrounds of those who arrive in the country have not been adequately explored. This article reports the findings of an exploratory survey conducted on a group of self-selected members of the British Columbia Association of Social Workers about their perception of their state of readiness to serve newcomers. The findings signal that the social work profession may be less than fully prepared to serve newcomers effectively. Observations related to social work education are outlined and suggestions are made about the practice of the profession.

Keywords: Immigrants · refugees · newcomers · competence

The 2006 Census (Statistics Canada, 2007b) confirms that the acceleration of Canada’s growth rate from 2001 to 2006 was largely a function of international immigration and that such immigration will remain the key force driving the country’s future population growth. By 2017, a projected 22% of the population will consist of immigrants, most of whom will reside in major urban centres—particularly Toronto, Montréal and Vancouver (Statistics Canada, 2005).

In 1967, Canada’s history of immigration shifted when a new “points system” resulted in a diversification of the countries of origin from which immigrants came (Christensen, 2008; Fleras & Elliott, 2003). The new system changed the demographic profile of immigrants to Canada. At least since the late 1970s, non-European immigration has not only diversified Canada’s cultural mosaic but has also significantly increased the number of resident visible minorities. According to Statistics Canada (2005), in 2017, visible

minority groups will account for about 85% of overall population growth.

Studies show that the numerous challenges faced by newcomers result in a variety of personal and familial hardships (Ataca & Barry, 2002; Dunn & Dyck, 2000; George & Tsang, 2000; Khan & Watson, 2005; Noh & Avison, 1996). Once settled in a host country, most newcomers adapt to a new way of life, a new set of social values and, in many cases, a new language, while struggling with dismantled support systems and heightened feelings of anxiety and stress (van Ecke, 2005). This process is particularly challenging for refugees who depart their countries of origin as a result of adverse political conditions, religious oppression or natural disasters (Jorden, Matheson & Anisman, 2009) and then have to go through a long interrogative process (Showler, 2006).


These hardships are further exacerbated by the economic challenges faced by immigrants. Studies show that compared to the general population or to earlier waves of immigrants,

today's immigrant has a higher unemployment rate and lower income and job security, even though they have a higher level of education than the general population overall (Gilmore, 2008; Hum & Simpson, 2004; Statistics Canada, 2007a). Very often, discrimination against newcomers in the employment arena is disguised as a credential issue or in claims that they lack the so-called Canadian experience (Boyd & Thomas, 2001) or a Canadian accent (Creese & Kambere, 2003).

In the last few decades, the social work profession has taken the initiative in enhancing its members' ability to deal with culturally and racially diverse clients. This is reflected in the educational and accreditation policies of the Canadian Association of Social Work Education and in the code of ethics adopted by the Canadian Association of Social Workers. Nonetheless, immigrant and refugee issues are rarely included specifically in different levels of social work education and training. Surveying the information that is available online, we find that only a handful of social work programs offer courses devoted to working with immigrants and refugees. Implicitly, the challenges that newcomers face are explored within courses on cross-cultural and anti-racist and oppressive practices.

Recognizing that the rapid growth of the immigrant population in Canada will have important implications for the social work profession, the British Columbia Association of Social Workers (BCASW) felt it important to explore whether members considered themselves well equipped to serve newcomers and the kinds of preparation they had in school and in the workplace. These issues are particularly important to social workers in British Columbia—one of the three major provinces in which newcomers tend to settle—particularly in the Metropolitan Vancouver area. According to the 2006 Census (Statistics Canada, 2007b), almost 36.4% of BC residents are immigrants. From 2001 to 2006, 177,840 newcomers decided to reside in this province.

In the last few decades, the social work profession has taken the initiative in enhancing its members' ability to deal with culturally and racially diverse clients....Nonetheless, immigrant and refugee issues are rarely included specifically in different levels of social work education and training.



Methodology

This exploratory study was organized by the BCASW. Authors of the article were volunteer researchers, and the study's intention was to provide a preliminary understanding among the members of BCASW rather than reach fully general conclusions. A survey method was adopted that could, in an economical and efficient way, generate a substantial amount of information covering a large constituency across the province (Fowler, 2002). We would like to thank BCASW for allowing us to publish the study's results.

In consultation with members of the Multiculturalism and Antiracism Committee (MARC), a standing committee of the BCASW with a specific mandate to advise the BCASW on cultural and racial issues related to the social work profession, the authors conceptualized and organized the questionnaire into four major sections:

- Whether newcomers and their issues are included as a mandate or as routine concerns in respondents' program and/or employing organization;

- Respondents’ perception of readiness and how much they know about the basic immigration policies and barriers challenging newcomers;
- The kinds of training respondents received in school and at work for working with newcomers and their suggestions regarding the social work training needed to prepare social workers to deal with newcomers;

- Respondents’ demographic data

Members of MARC pilot-tested both the text and online versions of the survey.

The survey was conducted via Survey Monkey, an online program that the BCASW had used to conduct a few studies among its members in the past, and was administered in April 2006 for a period of four weeks. We invited all BCASW members to participate through two emails and a notice with a link to the survey on the home page of BCASW website. Of BCASW’s 1,150 members, 218 (19%) took part in the survey, though some chose to complete only a few sections. Table 1 shows the number of respondents for each survey section.

Table 1
Respondents of each survey section

Survey section	No. of respondents
1. Organization and service	218
2. Knowledge of newcomers	195
3. Training	187
4. Demographic profile	186

Findings

Since, as an exploratory study, the intention was to provide only a preliminary picture of how members of BCASW perceived their readiness to deal with newcomers, only a descriptive level of statistical analysis was conducted and is

Table 2
Demographic profile of the respondents

Gender	Female	154
	Male	32
Age	Average age	47 years
	Median age	45-49 years
	Mode age	50-54 years
Nationality/Ethnicity	Canadian	140
	Self-identified cultural minority	51
	Self-identified racial minority	22
Education	Bachelor of social work	61
	Master of social work	95
	Other	30*
Area of work	Health or mental health	84
	Family and child protection	42
	Immigrant settlement	5

* Thirty respondents held a master’s degree in a field other than social work or were in the process of completing a social-work related degree.

Table 3
Respondents' self-perception of readiness (total 195 answered)

Answers	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I always pay close attention to news about newcomers.	21	96	74	4
I am quite familiar with policies that affect newcomers.	11	46	121	17
I am quite familiar with the difficulties that newcomers in Canada face.	36	110	41	8
I am well prepared to work with immigrants.	25	59	94	17
I am well prepared to work with refugees.	19	37	107	32

reported in this article. Of the 218 respondents who visited the survey, 186 completed the survey and supplied demographic information. Table 2 details the demographic breakdown of these 186 respondents.

In terms of gender, age group and nature of work, the profile resembles the general profile of the BCASW membership. Among the 218 respondents, only 5 reported they are worked in immigrant-settlement related services. In other words, at least as reflected in this group of respondents, social workers are not at the frontline of the immigrant settlement process.

Mandate of serving newcomers

A total of 217 responded to the questions regarding whether serving newcomers was included as a mandate in their employing organization or program. Most said that serving newcomers was not a specific mandate of the organization that employed them (66.4%, n=144) or the program in which they worked (74.2%, n=161). In their current job, only 43% (n=93) were notified of their clients' newcomer status, while only 37% (n=79) were required to know their

clients' newcomer status. Most respondents reported that the issues facing newcomers are seldom (34.6%, n=75) or never (28.1%, n=61) discussed in organizational meetings. These findings indicate that newcomer issues have not been a major concern of most respondents, at least in the organization and program that they serve.

Knowledge and readiness

In terms of how ready they feel to serve newcomers (see Table 3), out of the 195 respondents who answered this question, a large proportion agreed or strongly agreed with the following statements:

- I always pay close attention to news about newcomers (60%, n=117).
- I am quite familiar with the difficulties that newcomers to Canada face (75%, n=146).

Meanwhile, a majority disagreed or strongly disagreed with the following statements:

- I am quite familiar with policies that affect newcomers (71%, n=138).

- I am well prepared to work with immigrants (57%, n=111).
- I am well prepared to work with refugees (71%, n=139).

Respondents’ knowledge of newcomers’ difficulties was also reflected in their answers to questions about the challenges newcomers face within the labour market. Lack of recognition of foreign credentials or qualifications and language proficiency were identified by 83% (n=161) and 63% (n=122) of respondents, respectively, as major challenges to newcomers.

Regarding policy issues, respondents’ familiarity with immigration policies was examined. In terms of the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*, the major piece of legislation governing Canada’s immigration policy, 22% (n=43) of respondents had never heard of it, while 52% (n=101) had heard of it but knew nothing of its details. The situation is even worse with respect to the Canada–U.S. Safe Third Country Agreement, which was formulated after 9/11 and highly criticized by refugee advocates for blocking legitimate refugees coming across the U.S. border. Fifty-five percent (n=107) of respondents had never heard of this Agreement. These results indicate that although the respondents have taken the initiative to understand the issues facing newcomers, they lack understanding of the

policies and their possible impacts. Also, a high proportion feels that they are not adequately prepared to work with newcomers, and in particular refugees.

The survey then turns to the question, “In what respects do respondents feel prepared or unprepared?” Respondents were asked to name three issues of newcomers that they a) frequently come across, b) feel require urgent social work intervention and c) feel least prepared to intervene in. Table 4 summarizes the results. The responses indicate that most respondents, when taking into consideration what the respondents frequently come across and what they believe requires urgent social work intervention, feel relatively well prepared to help newcomers in terms of economic security and emotional and mental health issues but least prepared in terms of language (33%, n=65), cultural adaptation (37%, n=73) and immigration matters (44%, n=86).

Training received and suggested

When it comes to training, out of the 187 respondents who answered questions in this section, only 19% (n=36) had taken courses specific to working with newcomers, while a relatively greater percentage had taken courses on working with cultural sensitivity (65.8%, n=124) and anti-racist practices

Table 4
Perceived issues of newcomers (n=195)

Answers	Frequent %	Imminent %	Least prepared %
Economic security	34.9	34.4	19.0
Emotional and mental health issues	35.4	39.0	18.0
Cultural adaptation	28.2	44.6	36.9
Immigration matters such as immigrant status and sponsorship	25.1	20.5	44.0
Language	38.5	16.4	32.8

* Respondents could choose up to three issues in each column.

(39.8%, n=75). Similarly, many of the organizations employing the respondents had offered training in working with culturally different clients (64.7%, n=121) and visible minority clients (43.3%, n=81). However, only 21% (n=40) and 12% (n=23) of respondents' employing organizations provided in-service training specifically focused on working with immigrants and refugees, respectively. During their academic studies, just 27% (n=50) of respondents took a course related to newcomer issues, 10% (n=19) said none of their courses covered any such material and 47% (n=88) and 24% (n=45), respectively, reported the topic of immigrants was rarely covered in any courses or only in a small number of courses.

We also wanted to ascertain whether respondents felt that cross-cultural and anti-oppressive training was sufficient preparation for them to work with newcomers. A surprisingly high percentage of respondents thought that a general cross-cultural (76.5%, n=144) and/or anti-oppressive (73.8%, n=139) class was necessary but not sufficient preparation and overwhelmingly noted in their comments that these courses lack specificity in terms of explaining the policies, programs, difficulties, needs and issues unique to newcomers. These are topics that they wanted to see included in both formal social work and in-service training courses.

When asked if courses on working with newcomers are needed, most respondents indicated that a required or elective course is needed at both the BSW (95%, n=178) and MSW level (90%, n=169). While 55% (n=103) agreed that such a course should be required at the BSW level, only 44% (n=83) thought the same when it came to MSW studies. Respondents also indicated that the professional association, in this case the BCASW, has a role to play in providing workshops (81%, n=152), a continuing education certificate (57%, n=107) or an online course (51%, n=96) on how to work with newcomers.

Discussion and implications

As an exploratory study without a probability sampling process, this survey does not provide results leading to generalizations on the Canadian social work profession. Still, these findings may shed light on the basic question that the study poses: Are social workers ready to serve newcomers? Apparently, the answer from at least a portion of BCASW members is, "No, we are not ready—not yet."

We are keenly aware that social workers need to have knowledge not only of the relevant policies and laws that tell us what to do and not to do but also of the rights of our clients and the challenges that they confront. Canadian policies and laws on immigration certainly impact newcomers, who will become a major component of the Canadian population.

The survey's findings lead to at least three observations. First, both organizationally and in terms of programs, newcomer issues have not been included in routine social work practice and settings. As Herberg (1993) has long stated, the migration process is a continuous process cutting through multiple temporal as well as geographical horizons. In each specific horizon, migrants have to deal with the different challenges caused by up-rooting, settling and re-rooting. Accumulated through this process is a psycho-social history that is critical to social work intervention

(van Ecke, 2005). The program and organizational lapses in dealing with newcomer issues put professional competence in doubt. As such, how can we ensure our profession is competent in servicing newcomers?

Second, according to the respondents, their own knowledge of newcomers, particularly in terms of immigration policies and processes, is limited. Very often, what they know is based on the digested and slanted information presented in the public media, information that tends to conflate the varying challenges facing a multi-million dollar entrepreneur, a highly skilled engineer, a housewife, a live-in caregiver and a traumatized refugee. We are keenly aware that social workers need to have knowledge not only of the relevant policies and laws that tell us what to do and not to do but also of the rights of our clients and the challenges that they confront. Canadian policies and laws on immigration certainly impact newcomers, who will become a major component of the Canadian population. Should understanding of these policies and laws not then be part of the knowledge of a competent social worker?

Third, newcomers to Canada have multiple identities. An intersectional analysis must take into consideration the salience of different identities in different contexts (Berry, 2007; Dei, 1999). We argue that in the early phase of settling in Canada, newcomer status is itself the most salient identity with which most newcomers have to struggle. The findings of this survey certainly reflect the fact that respondents also feel a pressing need to understand each of the following: the unique situation of newcomers in terms of Canadian immigration policy, the migration process of individuals, the personal and structural challenges and conditions of migrants as well as the existing settlement programs and services along with their limitations. In our commitment to continually examine the quality of both social work education and social work practice, we must ask ourselves, "How can this pressing need be met?"

Taking these three observations into consideration, we draw attention to the existing focus of Canadian social work education. To judge from the survey input, newcomer issues are inadequately covered in existing social work curricula. Although a handful of courses on working with immigrants and/or refugees are offered in social work programs across Canada, almost all of them are elective rather than required courses. The CASWE accreditation standard has not directly pinpointed the necessity of covering relevant information and materials related to newcomers. Given the demographic changes in Canada, the increasing numbers of newcomers and the unique challenges they face, should newcomer issues not be a major component of the courses of study?

Conclusion

Findings of this exploratory study are tentative. The questions raised here are, however, critical to the social work profession. To answer these questions, more research is needed to ascertain whether this is a phenomenon exclusive to BC. Nonetheless, we hope that these preliminary findings can at least prompt us to consider whether social work practitioners are effectively equipped to work with newcomers at different levels and to think about what should be done in social work education and training, as well as our daily practice, to ensure that our profession is competently serving this growing population of newcomers, who are part of our Canadian society.

References

- Ataca, B. & Barry, J.W. (2002). Psychological, socio-cultural, and marital adaptation of Turkish immigrant couples in Canada. *International Journal of Psychology*, 37(1), 13–26.
- Berry, K.S. (2007). Exploring the authority of whiteness in education: An auto-ethnographic journey. In P. R. Carr & D. E. Lund (Eds.), *The Great White North?* (19–32). Rotterdam/Taipei: Sense Publisher.

Boyd, M. & Thomas, D. (2001). Match or mismatch? The employment of immigrant engineers in Canada's labour force. *Population Research and Policy Review*, 20(1/2), 107–133.

Canada. Statistics Canada. (2005). *Population Projections of Visible Minority Groups, Canada, Provinces and Regions: 2001–2017* (No. 91-541-XIE). Ottawa: Ministry of Industry.

———. (2007a). *The Canadian Immigrant Labour Market in 2006: First Results from Canada's Labour Force Survey* (No. 71-606-XIE2007001). Ottawa: Ministry of Industry.

———. (2007b). *Immigration in Canada: A portrait of the foreign-born population, 2006 Census* (No. 97-557-XIE). Ottawa: Minister of Industry. Showler, P. (2006). *Refugee Sandwich: Stories of Exile and Asylum*. Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Christensen, C.P. (2008). Immigrants: History and current issues. In J. C. Turner & F. J. Turner (Eds.), *Canadian Social Welfare* (6th ed., p. 135–166). Toronto: Pearson Education Canada.

Creese, G. & Kambere, E.N. (2003). What colour is your English? *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, 40(5), 565–573.

Dei, G.J.S. (1999). The Denial of Difference: Reframing anti-racist praxis. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 2(1), 17–37.

Dunn, J.R. & Dyck, I. (2000). Social determinants of health in Canada's immigrant population: Results from the National Population Health Survey. *Social Science & Medicine*, 51(11), 1573–1593.

Fleras, A. & Elliott, J.L. (2003). *Unequal Relations: An Introduction to Race and Ethnic Dynamics in Canada* (4th ed.). Toronto: Prentice Hall.

Fowler, F.J. (2002). *Survey Research Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

George, U., & Tsang, A.K.T. (2000). Newcomers to Canada from former Yugoslavia. *International Social Work*, 43(3), 381–393.

Gilmore, J. (2008). *The Canadian Immigrant Labour Market in 2007*. Ottawa: Ministry of Industry.

Herberg, D.C. (1993). *Framework for Cultural and Racial Diversity*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press.

Hum, D. & Simpson, W. (2004). Economic integration of immigrants to Canada: A short survey. *Canadian Journal of Urban Research*, 13(1), 46–61.

Jorden, S., Matheson, K. & Anisman, H. (2009). Supportive and unsupportive social interactions in relation to cultural adaptation and psychological distress among Somali refugees exposed to collective or personal traumas. *Journal of Cross-cultural Psychology*, 40(5), 853–874.

Khan, S., & Watson, J.C. (2005). The Canadian immigration experiences of Pakistani women: Dreams confront reality. *Counseling Psychology Quarterly*, 8(4), 307–317.

Noh, S. & Avison, W.R. (1996). Asian immigrants and the stress process: A study of Korean in Canada. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 37(June), 192–206.

Showler, P. (2006). *Refugee sandwich: Stories of exile and asylum*. Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press.

van Ecke, Y. (2005). Immigration from an attachment perspective. *Social Behavior and Personality*, 33(5), 467–476.

Biographical notes

Miu Chung Yan is an associate professor at the University of British Columbia. His major research areas include place-based multiservice organizations, immigrant settlement and integration, youth from immigrant family as well as cross-cultural and anti-racist social work practice.

Sherman Chan, director of Settlement Services at MOSAIC, has 28 years of experience in social service in Canada, Hong Kong, USA and Britain. He is a registered social worker with an MSc in applied social studies from the United Kingdom.

Note

¹ “Newcomer” is commonly used in government policy and in discussions in the literature as an inclusive term for both immigrants and refugees. Recognizing the diversity among newcomers and the different life prospects of immigrants and refugees, we employ the term only as convenient shorthand. In cases where the term is in our judgment apt to blur important differences, we use “immigrant” and “refugee” for the sake of precision.

Challenges Faced by Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Newcomers

Implications for Services

Brian O'Neill

Abstract

The goal of immigrant settlement services is to help newcomers to establish themselves in Canada, and to participate fully in the community's economic and social life. Although service providers have recognized the settlement needs of various other populations, those specific to lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) newcomers have, for the most part, been overlooked. In addition to coping with language and cultural differences, and possibly discrimination based on race, gender, or disability, LGB newcomers may also encounter barriers related to their sexual orientation. This article describes a qualitative study of the perceptions of 24 participants—6 LGB newcomers, and 18 settlement service workers—regarding the challenges faced by LGB people, and the issues relevant to serving them. The study highlights the importance for social workers of understanding newcomers' values and practices in regard to same-sex orientation; the need for safety and acceptance of LGB people in immigrant communities; and the necessity of welcoming newcomers into mainstream LGB communities. The article also proposes some directions for developing more inclusive and responsive services.

Keywords: Immigrants • gay • lesbian • bisexual • settlement services

Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) funds settlement services in order to “facilitate the full and equal participation of all newcomers in Canadian society” (Canadian Council for Refugees, 1998). While CIC has recognized some specific needs, such as those of poor, non-white, female, and young immigrants and refugees (Omidvar & Richmond, 2005), those of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) newcomers have, for the most part, been overlooked. All newcomers to Canada may have to deal with language and cultural differences, and possibly discrimination based on race, gender, or disability (Weerasinghe & Williams, 2002). In addition, LGB newcomers may also encounter “heterosexism,” or prejudice related to their sexual orientation (Herek, 2004; Walls, 2008)—

both in society at large, and even (or especially) within their own ethnic communities. In this article, I briefly describe key aspects of social work with LGB newcomers. Drawing on findings of an exploratory study of immigrant settlement services, I outline the challenges faced by LGB newcomers, and identify issues that social workers should consider in their practice with these populations.

Social work practice

Cultural competence is a prerequisite for effective cross-cultural social work (Este, 2007): service providers should be aware of their clients' cultures, should understand the migration process and its challenges, and

should be aware of their own cultural socialization, and of how it shapes their views and interventions. Most importantly, they should be accepting of personal and social differences, and should be able to relate to people from cultures other than their own. Cultural competence is an ideal, and one that is often difficult to fully attain, given the diversity both within and between cultures, and their state of continual development. Another limitation is that most models of cultural competency fail to mention the aspects of power differences and discrimination—which can be key factors in the exclusion of newcomers. In light of Canada's values of social justice, this can be a major concern for social workers (Bernard & Moriah, 2007).

LGB newcomers may encounter “heterosexism,” or prejudice related to their sexual orientation—both in society at large, and even (or especially) within their own ethnic communities.

Social work practice and same-sex orientation

The terms “gay” and “lesbian” have been widely adopted by people with same-sex orientation, perhaps in part to counter the stigma associated with the psychiatric term “homosexual” (Altman 2004). “Coming out” as an LGB person enhances psychosocial well-being (Halpin & Allen 2004), and contributes somewhat to the greater acceptance of LGB people at the societal level (Warner 2002). However, some same-sex oriented individuals do not

come out—either because they do not identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, or because they fear discrimination should their sexuality be known.

Effective social work with LGB people is similar in scope to the main values of cultural competence discussed above. Specific components (identified by Crisp, 2006, and Van Den Bergh & Crisp, 2004) include acceptance of same-sex orientation as a positive expression of sexuality, and recognition of the diversity of sexual orientation among clients. In terms of knowledge, social workers should understand the process of identity formation in relation to sexual orientation and coming out; appreciate the impact of heterosexism on individuals, communities and organizations; be aware of their own feelings about sexuality, and how these may influence their practice; and know about relevant community resources. Social workers should also be able to relate to people of various sexual orientations; to accurately assess problems; to make appropriate referrals; and to counter heterosexism and its effects, both at personal and institutional levels. As in all cross-cultural practice, it is important to keep in mind that LGB populations may be diverse; and more significantly, that safety must be maximized for all clients, regardless of their sexual orientation.

Settlement services and LGB newcomers

A goal of this qualitative descriptive study (Sandelowski, 2000) was to gather information about the challenges faced by LGB newcomers, and the issues involved in responding to them—from both the newcomers' own perspectives, and those of settlement service workers. Accordingly, six participants were recruited by advertisements circulated through LGB community organizations and settlement services: three lesbian immigrants, two gay male refugees, and one gay male immigrant. Five were from Asia, and one was from South America. Ages ranged between 25 and 50,

and all but one had post-secondary education. Three had been in Canada less than five years, the other three more than 10 years.

Other participants included 18 service providers, recruited from several agencies. 11 were women and seven were men; of these, all but two were themselves immigrants who had been in Canada for at least 10 years. Within this sample, there were two gay men, one a refugee. Nearly all (17) were aged between 30 and 50; one was in his twenties. All had post-secondary education, primarily in the social sciences. Eight participants were managers, the rest front-line workers, including one volunteer.

To conduct this study, semi-structured interviews explored perceptions of LGB newcomers' needs and their experiences with services; and also, from the perspective of the agencies and their workers, the issue of policies, programs, and recommendations. The transcripts of these interviews were examined for common themes, using qualitative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Despite the small sample size, a number of important issues emerged that are pertinent to the task of responding to LGB needs.

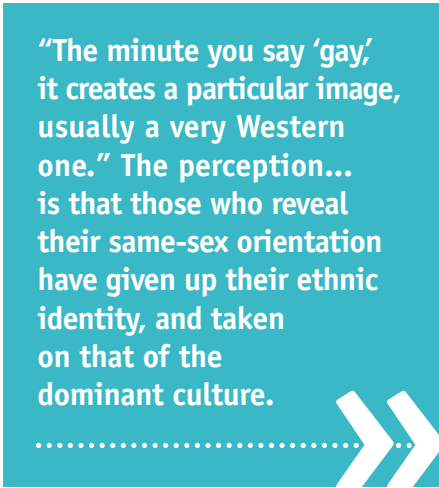
Coming out

In common with many native-born Canadians, newcomers may not identify as LGB despite their same-sex attraction and behaviour. However, even those who do identify as LGB may avoid coming out, for fear of offending community members. As one respondent put it:

If you're from an individualistic community, it doesn't matter if you stand up and want to be different. That drives the coming-out perspective of the West: you have to be honest, be proud, and fight for acceptance. But if it's a more collectivist community, where the main value is harmony within the group, people do not want to stand out. They want to be part of the group.

This need to conform to community values, and to keep private all information about sexuality, can impede discussion of gay-related issues even when newcomers do seek help from settlement services. As one astute lesbian newcomer observed, in some ethnic communities: "The minute you say 'gay,' it creates a particular image, usually a very Western one." The perception, she realized, is that those who reveal their same-sex orientation have given up their ethnic identity, and taken on that of the dominant culture.

"The minute you say 'gay,' it creates a particular image, usually a very Western one." The perception... is that those who reveal their same-sex orientation have given up their ethnic identity, and taken on that of the dominant culture.



On the other hand, some newcomers resist pressure to be silent regarding their sexuality. One participant in this study, Francisco Ibanez-Carrasco, specifically asked to be identified by name as a gay, HIV-positive, Latino man. He felt it was important for himself, and others like him, that he "go public" with his identity. However, not all newcomers are this brave, and their reticence impedes recognition of their needs. Two of the main challenges highlighted by many participants were overcoming a sense of isolation, and making use of social services. These points are discussed below.

Overcoming isolation

Some LGBT participants identified the need for acceptance and support within their cultural communities, without having to conceal their sexual orientation. A gay newcomer described the isolation he and others like him experienced:

Because of language and the cultural perspective, it’s difficult to meet people. He’s lonely, but cannot find a boyfriend. He wants a relationship, but doesn’t feel that he has a community.

LGBT newcomers may be wary of being open about their sexuality within their own communities, because of having experienced negative attitudes in their countries of origin. Although they may wish to connect with their peers for social support, anxiety about exposure can inhibit their reaching out. And while there are some ethno-specific LGBT groups, often newcomers look to mainstream groups in order to make social connections. However, as a gay settlement worker noted:

It’s tough. It’s psychologically exhausting. If he wants to find people who are similar to him sexually, he’d probably go downtown to the gay village. So there’s a separation between the two, and sometimes it’s difficult to reconcile them.

LGBT newcomers may be wary of being open about their sexuality within their own communities, because they have experienced negative attitudes in their countries of origin.



Unfortunately, in addition to feeling like outcasts in their ethnic communities because of their sexuality, newcomers may also feel excluded from dominant-culture LGBT communities because of their ethnicity. Having to seek friends outside their own cultures can exacerbate newcomers’ sense of being outsiders in both communities. This makes it very difficult for them to integrate their ethnic and sexual identities. Participants identified the need for help from settlement services in resolving this dilemma, perhaps by addressing the two main issues: those related to racial and cultural differences in dominant-culture LGBT organizations, and those related to sexual diversity in ethno-specific groups.

Using social services

Many participants noted that it may be easier and more effective to access information in their own native language, particularly when the topic is a sensitive and personal one—such as sexuality, abuse within relationships, or health issues. For instance, LGBT newcomers from societies in which same-sex sexuality is hidden may be particularly vulnerable to HIV infection, because they may lack information and education on prevention methods. Ibanez-Carrasco noted newcomers’ need for information and support:

If you come from a region of the world where there’s a lot of silence surrounding HIV, you can get infected very quickly here—people don’t have the necessary networks.

Another LGBT service provider commented that newcomers may need the support of a person from their own culture in accessing HIV services.

Perception of risk

The *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* allows individuals to seek refugee status if they fear persecution in their own countries because

of their sexual orientation. However, as one newcomer commented, seeking status on this basis can be dangerous, since there is always the risk of the claim being denied—leaving the applicant vulnerable to further abuse in the home country. Such fear of abuse may also be the reason that so few newcomers refer to their sexual orientation when using settlement services (and the topic is one that few service providers think to raise). LGB newcomers may not feel safe seeking help with sexual issues, because previous experiences in their homelands have left them very reluctant to reveal sensitive personal information to “official” organizations. As one gay settlement worker commented:

Where I came from, in government agencies, confidentiality and respect are not guaranteed. I don't trust them.

Seeking refugee status on the basis of sexual orientation can be dangerous, since there is always the risk of one's claim being denied—leaving the applicant vulnerable to further abuse in the home country.

Service providers speculated that LGB newcomers may be particularly wary of coming out to an agency that focuses on serving their particular ethnic group, out of fear that information about their sexuality might somehow leak out to their community. Adding to such anxiety is the suspicion, voiced by a lesbian newcomer, that heterosexism within her own community could also be reflected in the ethno-specific agency:

I would not feel comfortable going to a settlement agency, because I don't feel that my community is very open—especially since I attended that anti-same-sex marriage rally. Those people at the agency look just like me.

Consistent with this is another observation by a gay newcomer that “colour-blind” agencies that claim to “treat everyone equally” may in fact ignore LGB people, and fail to take into account their particular needs. This makes it difficult for gay newcomers to trust settlement services enough to be open about who they are—and hence for agencies to become aware of the needs of this population.

Recognizing needs

In the task of helping agencies to understand the needs of LGB newcomers, individuals' attitudes may influence recognition. For example, a gay newcomer who tried to seek help for sex-related issues had to use the services of an interpreter to communicate with the service provider; he described how the latter unintentionally distorted his comments:

I realized, “No, that's not what I wanted to say.” You have to help the interpreter if she is not saying the truth, because sometimes they feel uncomfortable.

He perceived that the interpreter's embarrassment, and her need to avoid talking about sexuality, caused her to translate his comments inaccurately. If clients detect such reactions, they are unlikely to be forthcoming about their needs.

Although agency managers could see how information about clients' gender was relevant to their mission, some could not fathom how information about sexual identity could be similarly useful. However, if agencies do not gather information about the sexual orientation of their clients, they cannot identify needs that are specific to LGB newcomers. Service providers worry about the reactions

of individual clients if they raise the issue of sexual orientation (perhaps inaccurately); they also worry about the reactions of the community at large. They may feel trepidation that homophobia may operate against the agency, in both the mainstream and the ethnic cultures; and that this may affect their funding.

The ethnic community might criticize the agency, so they’d rather be non-gay, non-controversial, and not have any programs or acknowledgement of gay people.

to sexual diversity in their policies, program descriptions, publicity, and service procedures. A service provider observed that it made a significant difference when an agency had “senior management who were openly gay.” In that situation, there is an obvious incentive to making services more comfortable for LGB workers and clients. Given the challenges mentioned earlier with using mainstream services, participants recommended that settlement agencies make information freely available, in various languages, on the issues of sexual health, same-sex relationships, sexual discrimination, and sexual abuse. They also advocated the use of gender-neutral language, and suggested that social workers take care to provide opportunities for clients to identify their sexual orientation during intake practices, if they desire to do so.

Policies and services

Despite the above, many participants identified initiatives in several areas that agencies could undertake to support the integration of LGB newcomers. One settlement worker noted that the values that newcomers bring from their homelands may even influence the cultures of service organizations, causing them to strategically ignore LGB people:

The ethnic community might criticize the agency, so they’d rather be non-gay, non-controversial, and not have any programs or acknowledgement of gay people.

It would be a big step toward greater inclusion if settlement services officially recognized the presence of LGB people, both within their organizations and in the populations they serve. A lesbian newcomer suggested that agencies include references

Staff development

Participants emphasized the importance of education for agency staff regarding LGB issues in general, and more specifically in relation to integration. A lesbian newcomer pointed out the value of training that is culturally appropriate:

Different communities express their queerness in different ways. If you learn about gay and lesbian issues just in a North American context, you think that all people are gay in this way. But folks from your own community might not relate to gayness in that way.

She also felt it was important for LGB issues to be integrated into all aspects of staff training, rather than isolated in separate workshops.

Community development

In order for settlement services to become more inclusive of LGB people, some service providers argued that support from the

newcomers' communities is vital. They advocated fostering dialogue within the ethnic communities regarding sexuality and heterosexism, and also advocated creating links between settlement services and LGB organizations. A service provider described the positive impact of LGB people volunteering in settlement agencies:

It's good to have gay ambassadors. I know an Asian guy who volunteers for a settlement agency—he's out, and they love him. It's an educational process: they ask him questions, they're comfortable, he's a part of the community.

To understand the fears that LGB newcomers may bring with them when they migrate, workers should know about the legal status of same-sex behaviour in the countries whose cultures they deal with.

One participant commented that such collaboration can enhance capacity in both settlement agencies and LGB community services. On the other hand, as a lesbian newcomer pointed out, LGB community organizations are not always welcoming of newcomers—in part because of racism.

Conclusion

Furthering the inclusion of LGB newcomers in mainstream Canadian society is consistent with the social work commitment to social justice. However, to meet this goal, it is

important that the challenges identified by participants in this study be considered, and steps taken to address them.

The findings of this study have implications for culturally competent practice with LGB newcomers who settle in Canada. Ensuring their physical and emotional safety is a key factor. The testimony of various participants highlights the importance of social workers being aware of the values held about sexuality and gender roles in the newcomers' homelands and ethnic communities, and the diverse expectations regarding identity management in various cultures. To understand the fears that LGB newcomers may bring with them when they migrate, workers should know about the legal status of same-sex behaviour in the countries whose cultures they deal with. In these and all other aspects of sexuality, social workers need to be aware of the powerful combined effects of oppressions related to race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality. In addition, social workers should be aware of their own values and assumptions on LGB issues, and of how these might affect their practice.

Several resources may be useful to social workers with LGB newcomers for clients. The Canadian Council for Refugees' 2009 publication, *Pathways to Gender Justice Handbook*, provides guidance on addressing LGB and transgender issues at various levels: policy, program development, and delivering direct services. In the same year, the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants undertook a project called the Creating Safe and Positive Space for LGBTQ Newcomers Initiative. Information about this is available at tinyurl.com/mrzdxd. Support for people seeking refugee status on the basis of sexual orientation is available from the Canadian Rainbow Refugee Committee, by contacting rainbowrefugee@yahoo.com. Finally, the Lesbian and Gay Immigration Taskforce, LEGIT (www.legit.ca), provides information about the sponsorship of same-sex partners.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to acknowledge the contributions of his research assistant, Kamala Sproule, MSW, and the support of the UBC HSS-Hampton Fund.

References

- Altman, D. (2004). Gay/lesbian movements. *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences* (pp. 5895–5899). Retrieved May 2, 2009 from www.sciencedirect.com/science/referenceworks
- Bernard, W.T., & Moriah, J. (2007). Cultural competency: An individual or institutional responsibility. *Canadian Social Work Review / Revue canadienne de service social*, 24(1), 81–92.
- Canadian Council for Refugees. (1998). *Best settlement practices: Settlement services for immigrants and refugees in Canada*. Ottawa, Ontario: CCR. Retrieved October 30, 2009 from www.ccrweb.ca
- . (2009). Pathways to gender justice handbook. Retrieved May 17, 2010 from www.ccrweb.ca/genderhandbook.pdf
- Crisp, C. (2006). The gay affirmative practice scale (GAP): A new measure for assessing cultural competence with gay and lesbian clients. *Social Work*, 51(1), 115–126.
- Este, D. (2007). Cultural competency and social work practice in Canada: A retrospective examination. *Canadian Social Work Review / Revue canadienne de service social*, 24(1), 93–104.
- Herek, G.M. (2004). Beyond “homophobia”: Thinking about sexual prejudice and stigma in the twenty-first century. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*, 1(2), 6–24.
- Halpin, S.A., & Allen, M.W. (2004). Changes in psychosocial well-being during stages of gay identity development. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 47(2), 109–126.
- Hsieh, H.F., & Shannon, S.E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15(9), 1277–1288.
- Omidvar, R., & Richmond, T. (2005). Immigrant settlement and social inclusion in Canada. In T. Richmond & A. Saloojee (Eds.), *Social inclusion: Canadian perspectives* (p. 155–179). Toronto: Fernwood Publications.
- Sandelowski, M. (2000). What ever happened to qualitative description? *Research in Nursing and Health*, 23, 334–340.
- Van Den Bergh, N., & Crisp, C. (2004). Defining culturally competent practice with sexual minorities: Implications for social work education and practice. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 40(2), 221–238.
- Walls, N.E. (2008). Toward a multidimensional understanding of heterosexism: The changing nature of prejudice. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 55(1), 20–70.
- Warner, T. (2002). *Never going back: A history of queer activism in Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Weerasinghe, S., & Williams, L.S. (2002). *Health and the intersections of diversity: A challenge paper on selected program, policy and research issues*. Retrieved October 30, 2009 from http://atlantic.metropolis.net/temp/Weerasinghe_williams_2002.doc

Biographical notes

Associate professor, School of Social Work, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Brian O'Neill's research and teaching focuses on the responsiveness of social services to marginalized groups, particularly lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people.

Working from Within Endemic HIV Stigma

Developing Canadian Social Workers' Understanding of the Challenges Faced by Newcomers Managing HIV

Laura M. Bisailon

Abstract

HIV stigma is central to this article's discussion and analysis because of the widely documented negative social and health impacts of stigma on Canadians living with HIV in general and ethnocultural communities in particular. The goal of this theoretically and empirically informed article is to provide insight for Canadian social workers on the challenges faced by newcomers infected with or affected by HIV. This is achieved by problematizing sociocultural contexts that sustain stigmatization and exploring how these interact with people living with HIV and Aids (PHAs). Increased caseloads of migrant PHAs in Canada since early 2002 means that social workers throughout Canada have had to adjust and acquire new competencies. This article is informed by field research and social work practice with newcomers in three Canadian cities. HIV stigma is endemic in Canada, and this article posits that social workers with an increased critical awareness about stigma on individual, social and translocal levels can best support migrant PHAs. This article concludes with two key messages for social workers.

Keywords: HIV • stigma • Canada • immigration • people living with HIV and AIDS (PHA) • social work • newcomers • social interaction • critical theory • determinants of health • ethnocultural

Story and science are interrelated, interactive and ultimately constitute each other....The natural world and the cultural worlds share the burden of creating disease realities.

(Goldstein, 2004, p. XIII)

One continually learns and relearns to live with as much as through one's body, in its various states of health and illness, youth and old age, boredom and trauma, routine and instability.

(Biehl, Good, Kleinman, 2007, p. 9-10)

There is a significant body of literature discussing the existence of HIV-related stigma in general (Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network [CHLN], 2004; Crawford, 1996; Derlega & Barbee, 1998; Roth & Hogan, 1998) and

the persistence and implications of HIV-related stigma among newcomers and long-standing ethnocultural communities in Canada in particular (African Caribbean Council on HIV/AIDS in Ontario [ACCHO], 2006; Committee for Accessible AIDS Treatment, 2008; Lawson et al., 2006). Stigma is "an attribute that is deeply discrediting," one that negatively impinges upon a person's identity and self-worth (Goffman, 1963, p. 1). More recent discussions of HIV stigma (Elliott et al., 1986; Herek & Glunt, 1988; Madru, 2003), including feminist perspectives (Fortin, 2005; Goupil, 2002), have informed this article. Social exclusion, denial of HIV status, personal suffering and

delays in seeking social support and medical treatment are some of the effects of stigmatization. Social exclusion and marginalization augment health disparities, which are enablers of HIV transmission (Anand et al., 2004; Wagstaff, 2002). The seriousness of the social and health impacts of HIV stigma, together with its tenacity among racialized immigrant communities in Canada, is the reason that stigma lies at the centre of this critical analysis.

The points raised in this article represent the first steps in a process of critical reflection about the origins of health-based stigma and how HIV stigma relates to broader social processes in Canada. Although social workers often work with stigmatized populations, the impact of HIV upon almost every aspect of a newcomer's daily life is particularly salient. The discussion of stigma is explored through Leary and Schreindorfer's (1998) HIV-specific theoretical framework. This article proposes that social support to migrant persons to Canada living with HIV is most effective together with an increased critical awareness of stigma set within broader social and societal contexts. Critically, discussion is informed by empirical research and practice with newcomers living with HIV in Canada.

Much of the literature on HIV stigma has focused on subjective experiences of living and coping with HIV. This means there is considerable literature in Canada about experiences with HIV from biographical and autobiographical standpoints (Lévy, 2007; Rudd & Taylor, 1992; Saint-Jarre, 1994). Less critically explored are the relationships between newcomers managing HIV and Canadian society. In this article, the larger sociocultural contexts that sustain stigmatization and the interactions that members of society have to people living with HIV and Aids (PHAs) are the analytical focus. With a concern for providing practical messages for Canadian social workers, this article concludes with two key messages, outlined in text boxes.

Background

Since 1990, Canada has received approximately 230,000 immigrants annually (Vissandjée et al., 2007), and nearly one in five resident persons in Canada is foreign-born (Statistics Canada, 2006). Social workers employed in HIV clinics and those working in front-line AIDS service organizations in Canada have witnessed sharp increases in the number of clients after January 2002 (Duchesneau, 2004). In 2002, mandatory HIV screening was introduced into the immigration medical examination. As a result, all applicants for Canadian permanent residency are currently being tested for HIV antibodies (Klein, 2001). Indeed, many people learn of their HIV status through immigration medical testing, as recent data testify (Text Box 1).

The increased caseloads of migrant PHAs in Canada has not been accompanied with increased financial or human resources; thus, social workers have had to make adjustments in light of this demographic change (Duchesneau, 2004; Lacroix, 2004, 2004–2005). Complex client cases have also meant that health care providers have had to acquire new competencies and responsibilities, while seeking support from networks of peers working with PHA newcomers throughout Canada (Munoz & Chirgwin, 2007). "Global forces impact on front-line practitioners in a number of diverse ways that lead to the internationalization of social problems" (Chitereka, 2009, p. 46).

Newcomers to Canada living with HIV soon learn that their health condition is classified chronic and manageable because of the quality of health care and availability of medicine. While health providers draw parallels between living with HIV and having diabetes, due to the chronic nature and required daily treatment for both patient groups, PHAs disagree with this comparison (Bisailon, 2008a, 2009); AIDS service providers hasten newcomers to selectively disclose their HIV status not only because of an upswing in criminalization linked to HIV-positive status in Canada since 2005 (CHLN, 2009) but also due to the stigmatization of HIV (De Bruyn, 2004; DesJarlais et al., 2006; McCann, 1999).

The subjective “othering” of non-citizens (Bibeau, 1991; Clatts et al., 1991; Corin, 2007; Woodsworth, 1972), constructions of women living with HIV (Hogan, 2001; Mensah, 2003; Treichler, 1999) and exclusionary immigration policies based on health (Coker, 2006; Gostin, 2004; Schloehardt, 2005; Worth, 2005) have been widely investigated. Unlike in many of the countries of origin of recent immigrants to Canada, HIV is not the object of mainstream population health interventions in this country. This outlier position of HIV can come as a surprise to newcomers, particularly if they hail from a country where HIV is endemic, where the infection is a central focus of health campaigns.


of concern (ACCHO, 2006; Vissandjée et al., 2007; Worth, Patton & Goldstein, 2005), pointing to continued relevance for sexual health programming in this country.

HIV-based stigma

This article proposes that HIV stigma is unavoidable and endemic in Canada because of dominant social constructions that support, rather than reduce, the stigma associated with disease. Discourses about resilience and emphasis on individual strength have contributed to intolerance of and blaming weak, ill, low-income, elderly and immigrant individuals (Blais & Mulligan-Roy, 2001; Dubos, 1961; McLaren, 1990). Discourses in this article refer to institutionalized thinking and speech that provide the contours for what is conventionally acceptable (Butler, 1997). Increased technocracy and emphasis on bio-medical dimensions of health care, which have eclipsed humane forms of care for the sick, have been lamented by numerous authors (Blais, 2008; Farmer & Kleinman, 1998; Illich, 1999). Campaigns of health promotion (Becker, 1986) and the pursuit of perfect health as an ideal—as an end in itself and not a state of being—is what Zola (1981) attributed to the medicalization of Western societies.

Despite increases in life expectancies for Canadian PHAs, attitudes about HIV have been slow to evolve, partly because HIV has achieved disease “super status” (Goffman, 1963, p. 8), where discourses are laden with exaggeration and morality (Sontag, 1989). Persons living with HIV have been described as internalizing and assimilating dominant societal views of the disease (Duffy, 2005; Mendès-Leite & Banens, 2006), and PHAs have perceived the effects of HIV stigma as being greater than the seriousness of the illness (Fife & Wright, 2000). Leary and Schreindorfer (1998) developed a framework for understanding HIV stigma, drawing from social interaction theory under the sociopolitical lens rather than that of the individual (Derlega &

HIV stigma is in large part a product of the construct of perceived danger or threat. These two elements are embedded in rhetoric and discourses and inscribed in historical narratives on immigration, wellness and social policy in Canada and abroad.



Field reports from work with immigrant and refugee applicants living with HIV in Canada reveal that persons are concerned about the framing of foreign-born persons as disease importers in the Canadian media (Bisailon, 2008a). This negative press coverage associates newcomers with disease importation (Kaufman, 2008) and undermines public health efforts, creating false impressions that HIV is not of consequence to the health of all Canadians. Migration is a risk factor for HIV transmission, and rates of infection post-arrival in Canada are

Barbee 1998). The authors write of PHAs' propensity for "social dissociation" in reaction to the factors discussed below (Leary & Schreindorfer, 1998, p. 3). This framework can be generalized to other chronic health conditions, allowing social workers to apply it to other serious conditions.

Threatening public health

Leary and Schreindorfer (1998) write that PHAs have historically represented a menace to public health. However, since 1991 in Canada, PHAs are not officially considered a threat to the public by virtue of their health status (Bailey et al., 2005). While applicants for Canadian permanent residency are currently assessed for the impact they may have upon public health and public security as well as the projected costs over 10 years to public social and health systems, only excessive costs to the latter will make an HIV-positive applicant ineligible for permanent settlement (Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, 2009; Citizen and Immigration Canada, 2002).

HIV stigma is in large part a product of the construct of *perceived* danger or threat. These two elements are embedded in rhetoric and discourses and inscribed in historical narratives on immigration, wellness and social policy in Canada and abroad (All-Party Group on AIDS, 2003; Joint Committee on Human Rights, 2007; Stauffer et al., 2002; Wiebe, 2008). African and Caribbean communities in Ontario have made links between HIV stigma and persistent associations with sexual taboos, sexual orientation and lifestyle choices (African and Caribbean Council on HIV/AIDS in Ontario, 2006; George et al., 2008; Tharao et al., 2006). Patton (1986) wrote about the irrational fear of sexuality as a generator for the spread of illness, persistence of HIV stigma, health-based discrimination and denial of civil rights in a U.S. context. Public education has had limited success in reversing negative behaviours and attitudes towards persons living with HIV (McCann, 1999), and Crawford (1996) has

suggested that adjusting expectations about the outcomes of public education related to HIV is more effective than trying to eradicate stigmatizing behaviour and attitudes.

Social support work in Montréal shows that it is common for newcomer women living with HIV to work in factories as a first point of entry to the Canadian job market.

Violating mainstream norms

People living with HIV face stigma because these individuals are associated with lifestyles popularly framed as morally wrong. Becker (1986) noted that there is generally low tolerance for those who transgress mainstream social norms (Text Box 2). In his research with health care providers, McCann (1999) described the reluctance, bias and moral judgment of physicians and nurses towards PHAs because of the negative opinions of those who use drugs. One doctor was noted as opting out of treating a PHA because the mode of infection was drug use; implications were that the patient was guilty of "negligence" and "deserving of sickness" (p. 360). A surgeon commented, "It is human nature if someone acquires something accidentally to be more sympathetic.... I think...professionals try hard not to make the distinction, but...others and maybe myself do...make that distinction" (p. 363).

However, there is evidence that health care providers attempt to keep bias at bay when working with PHAs. For example, Canadian social workers have said that although they may disagree with client-patient lifestyle choices, they recognized that care is absolute and not conditional on adherence to conventional norms

(Mill et al., 2007). Social workers in the Mill et al. (2007) study acknowledged that if mental illness and addictions are more prevalent within some populations than others, there is shared responsibility between society and the individual for the generative forces of asymmetries and ill health. While most newcomers with HIV will not have contracted their infection through drug use, the previous examples are reminders that ethical and moral judgments are invariably brought into the workplace; acknowledging and reflecting upon how these judgments influence work practices is critical to social work practice.

Social workers can imagine the world from the standpoint of the newcomer PHA, reflecting on how their cultural references and frameworks position them differently from clients and as “more aware of international issues.”



Failing to be “productive” to the public good

Individuals and groups are often stigmatized if they are *perceived* to be inadequately contributing to society. Wiebe (2009) and Abu-Laban (1998) historicize Canadian immigration law, policy and practice showing that applicants have had to comply with productive economic goals of the state to be admitted to the country, which often excluded admitting the ill. Constructions of newcomer PHAs only marginally contributing to the Canadian purse (through taxed labour market activities) can erroneously conceal and distort their varied contributions (Doyal, 1995; Simich, 2003).

Social support work in Montréal shows that it is common for newcomer women living with HIV to work in factories as a first point of entry to the Canadian job market (Bisailon, 2008b). Employment for these women in the manufacturing sector is often informal, irregular, seasonal and underpaid. Work in factory settings can also be undocumented and unregulated. Fatigue is a documented side effect of advanced HIV infection (Adinolfi, 2001). The fact that some jobs are less suitable for PHAs, for example manually intensive work, does not mean that newcomers to Canada do not engage in work practices in settings that are adverse to their health. Furthermore, if contribution to Canadian society is not framed to include unpaid labour that women engage in, then such investment in and engagement with Canadian society could readily be devalued or entirely unaccounted for (Gastaldo, 2004; Moussa, 1991).

Central messages for social work practice

While there are provincial variations in the ways newcomers with HIV experience health and social systems after arrival to Canada, the following suggestions are pertinent for social work practice across the country.

First, it is necessary to be aware of the broader sociocultural contexts. Discourses of health, wellness and sickness are constructions and reflections of a society’s normative value system. These are powerful communicators of the mainstream relationship with life’s milestones such as birth and death, including the esteem with which the sick are held. Such constructions have contributed to the tacit tendency—in practice, politics and policy—for culpability and intolerance of persons with chronic illness (Dubos, 1961). Social workers can imagine the world from the standpoint of the newcomer PHA, reflecting on how their cultural references and frameworks position them differently from clients and as “more aware of international issues” (Chitereka, 2009,

p. 50). Text Box 3 problematizes dimensions of the PHA experience and offers thinking points and practical resources to Canadian social workers that have emerged from domestic clinical and community practice.

Newcomers to Canada discover sociopolitical processes and health systems that are often different from those in their country of birth. Critical awareness that the terms Canadians commonly employ—health, well-being, sickness and illness—are culturally situated is useful to understand the responses and effects of HIV upon newcomers (and their dependents and extended families). For example, in a pilot study with women applying for refugee status, informants problematized “health” (Text Box 4), while others avoided verbalizing the terms HIV and AIDS (Bisailon, 2008a). Other informants in this research explained that they rejected the “sick” label, often employed by health providers, because they did not consider themselves to be ill, particularly when they were asymptomatic (of AIDS-defining illnesses). Descriptors assigned to migrant women such as “fragile” or “vulnerable” have entrenched the mystique of their vulnerability and de-emphasized their strengths, explaining the rejection of these descriptors by feminist scholars who debunk mythologies about migrant women (Moussa, 1993; Pittway & Pittway, 2004).

Second, independent of the setting (i.e., clinical, community, educational, other), social workers must plan interventions that take into account the complexities and ambiguities of overt and covert factors that have an impact on the health and well-being of newcomers to Canada living with HIV. Determinants of health are “the conditions in which people live and work that affect their opportunities to lead healthy lives. Good medical care is vital, but unless the root social causes that undermine people’s health are addressed, the opportunity for well-being will not be achieved” (Labonte & Schrecker, 2007, p. 2).

Text Box 5 summarizes a range of factors that reflect the determinants of health shown to influence the integration of newcomer PHAs

in Canada (Bisailon, 2008b, 2009). Of particular interest, HIV-related health concerns are eclipsed by seemingly more immediate, tangible and challenging factors (Galabuzi & Labonte, 2002; Lefranc, 2007; Marmot & Wilkinson, 2006; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2009). These factors may include, but are not limited to securing good quality, affordable housing; organizing family reunification and supporting absent families; deciphering and navigating the immigration system, including retaining legal counsel with adequate experience; and devising strategies for finding suitable employment in keeping with PHAs’ expertise and prior training.

In clinical settings, social workers will continue to play the complex role of mediator between medical staff and PHAs in the areas of client-patient advocacy, support with observing medicine regimes, client-patient understanding of medical jargon, education and prevention (e.g., condom use), access to medication, hidden health care costs and strategies for addressing stigmatization in personal and public spheres (e.g., workplace, child care). Critical and creative seeing, listening and doing from within a determinants-of-health framework will give the social worker an opportunity to gain a nuanced understanding of what the members of this subpopulation (and their families) may be experiencing after migration. With such a perspective, the social worker can be a strategic, upstream actor who connects the dots between individual, social and translocal factors—ones that converge to influence the quality and character of newcomer integration to Canada—that may otherwise go unnoticed or appear disparate.

Acknowledgements

The author thanks N om e Alain, MSW, and Shauna LaTosky for their valuable contributions in the preparation of this manuscript. Thanks are also extended to Dawn Allen, Louise Blais, Hasu Ghosh, Nadia L’Heureux-Greenberg, Catherine O’Neill and Darien Taylor for their constructive comments on this work.

Text Box 1

Immigration and HIV in Canada

Persons from countries where HIV is endemic are over-represented in Canadian HIV prevalence (Haag & Gilbert, 2007). However, the overall number of HIV-positive applicants admitted to Canada is small, both in proportionate and in real terms relative to the increase in the population through immigration and the resident HIV-positive population. In Canada, there are an estimated 70,000 persons known to be living with HIV, with one third of these people unaware that they are HIV-positive (Canadian Public Health Association, 2006). In 2006 and 2007, there were 1,050 HIV-positive applicants for Canadian permanent residence (Tessier, 2008). Of these applicants, 994 were family members or persons in need of protection (i.e., refugee or refugee applicant) and eligible to remain in Canada. Many of these persons applied from countries in which HIV is endemic (Falconer 2005; Réseau des chercheuses africaines, n.d.). Since mandatory HIV screening was inserted in the immigration medical examination in 2002, 258 PHAs have been inadmissible to Canada for anticipated prohibitive costs to public health and social systems (Tessier, 2008). Annually in Canada, “2,000 visa applicants are rejected on health grounds” (Wiebe, 2009, p. 135).

Text Box 2

HIV stigma in Canada

HIV stigma has been unevenly felt at different times in Canada. Belonging to a community with a high prevalence of HIV can mean that stereotypes and negative associations persist (Adrien, 1993; Adrien et al., 1999). For example, the label “4H” was introduced in household parlance in the 1980s, setting Haitians, homosexuals, heroine users and hemophiliacs apart from the Canadian mainstream (Gilmore & Somerville, 1994). While hemophiliacs living with HIV have aroused sympathy in practice and imagination because of the constructed meaning of their infection as victim of the contaminated blood affair (Orsini & Scala, 2006), the other groups within the “4H” category have not received the same empathetic treatment.

Text Box 3

Practical considerations for social workers in Canada

TREATMENT—Medicine for chronic conditions can come with unpleasant side effects as well as demanding and time-sensitive regimens (e.g., anti-retrovirals for HIV, insulin for diabetes). Newcomer PHAs are generally aware that access to medication is a life-saving opportunity. They are thankful for the care, support and access to subsidized drugs in Canada. Nevertheless, respecting the demands of medicine regimens is a considerable challenge for many people with chronic illness. Reluctance to taking medicines should not be construed as reckless resistance.

Consider: Some Canadian literature analyzes the complex relationship between pill-taking and PHAs. Social workers with newcomer PHA clients will find this literature relevant to their practice. See Making Care Visible, Research Group, 2002; McCoy, 2005; Mykhalovskiy & McCoy, 2002. See also Kelleher (1988) on coping with the demands of chronic illness.

Resources (bilingual): www.catie.ca; www.catie.ca/eng/myh/ch11.shtml

NUTRITION—Healthy diets are necessary to support the effectiveness of HIV medications. Social workers may refer PHAs to food banks, either those serving the general population or those tailored to PHAs. For numerous reasons, such as concern about stigma (i.e., being identified when frequenting services), loss of social status or shame (i.e., accessing government and other subsidies), PHAs may decide not to access services at food banks geared towards PHAs. The social worker refers the person to such services with the understanding that the person may or may not, for a complex set of reasons, actually act on the referral, and that it may take the person a long time to adjust to accessing cost-free services like food banks.

Consider: Social workers can consider accompanying clients to food banks. Alternatively, PHAs can be linked with service organizations for immigrants or people with AIDS that have buddy systems in place. In AIDS service organizations, peer outreach workers are often trained to accompany PHAs to medical appointments and other locations such as food banks.

Resources (bilingual): www.catie.ca/eng/LivingWithHIV/startingpoints.shtml;
www.catie.ca/eng/myh/ch4.shtml

DISCLOSURE—The decision to discuss a chronic health condition is a right that belongs strictly to the bearer of the condition. Under no circumstances should the social worker discuss the client's health status without the client's consent. Where the social worker deems it appropriate to disclose a client's health status, a respectful, detailed and clear discussion must take place with the PHA about why disclosure by the social worker—to an AIDS service organization, fellow health provider or other party—is perceived as appropriate.

Consider: Disclosure of serostatus by the social worker can further stigmatize the health condition. Newcomers with HIV are often surprised that their personal health information is shared among colleagues in the form of electronic data sharing and during medical rounds in clinical settings. Discussions about how and when their personal information will (and will not) be discussed shrinks the power imbalance between the client and the social worker. Confusion and conflict can in this way be abated.

Resource (bilingual): www.catie.ca/Eng/LivingWithHIV/justdiagnosed.shtml

MIGRATION—This is a time of loss and gain, a notion that may be hard for Canadians to understand, particularly if they themselves have not themselves been immigrants. Migrant persons lose supports of all kinds when they resettle. Gaining new networks will happen, but will occur incrementally overtime. In addition, many persons discover their HIV-positive status through Canadian immigration procedures and are often not favorable to disclosing their status over the telephone to persons in their country of origin. Concealing their serostatus (and possible denial), immigration delays and costs as well as family separation all generate stress. Basic needs (as per the determinants of health) are sometimes prioritized before biomedical health.

Consider: Social workers can learn the basics of the Canadian immigration system as it relates to the newcomer PHA. There are links at the websites below to national resources suitable for social workers. In every province, legal aid lawyers with expertise in immigration are available. It is often by word-of-mouth that lawyers with relevant expertise are identified.

Resources: www.catie.ca/eng/myh/ch17.shtml (bilingual); www.hivimmigration.ca/publications.html (English only); www.cleo.on.ca/english/pub/onpub/subject/refugee.htm (multilingual fact sheets, audio links); www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/publications/index.asp#immigrating (range of bilingual government publications)

Source: Author's collaboration with N. Alain, 2010

Text Box 4

Themes voiced by HIV-positive women refugee applicants to Canada

1. There is a universal quality to health; health is synonymous with life.
2. Organized religion provides comfort, security and hope; it can be of vital importance.
3. Learning and sharing occur as a result of trusting relationships cultivated overtime with fellow HIV-positive women and recognizing differences between women.
4. Immigrating is a stressful process, and impediments to easily adapting to Canada induce sustained worry over time (often linked to financial health).
5. HIV status is but one of a multitude of factors that make post-migratory life complex.
6. HIV is a serious condition that changes a life, both in terms of health and social status.

Source: Bisailon, 2008a

Text Box 5

Factors affecting integration of newcomers to Canada affected by HIV

1. Stigmatization in a professional or personal milieu

- Stigma, both real and perceived, of HIV and the PHA in the context of a “healthy” country (i.e., where HIV is not endemic and where life expectancy is long)
- Advantages and disadvantages of accessing services and employment as related to HIV status (i.e., categorization of the PHA as “disabled”; provincial variations in health and social services)

2. Bureaucratic delays associated with official procedures

- Securing working permits
- Appearing before the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (i.e., protracted delays and hearing postponements; reliving traumatic events through retelling in a “performance” to government officials)

3. Legal system challenging to navigate

- Official costs and processes associated with obtaining legal counsel
- Masked costs in retaining legal counsel (i.e., monetary “incentives” requested by lawyers)

4. Refugee and immigrant support services

- Ad hoc or disjointed connection between services (i.e., housing, food bank, health, social, legal, education)
- Connections contingent on goodwill and established networks of care providers (i.e., often social workers)

5. Secular and individualist society

- Different world views (ontology) from those seemingly held by mainstream Canada
- Predominantly secular society with disconnect to spiritual supports

Source: Bisailon, 2008a, 2009

References

- Abu-Laban, Y. (1998). Keeping 'em out: Gender, race, and class biases in Canadian immigration policy. In V. Strong-Boag, S. Grace, A. Eisenberg & J. Anderson (Eds.), *Painting the Maple Leaf: Essays on Race, Gender, and the Construction of Canada* (pp. 69–84). Vancouver: University of Vancouver Press.
- Adinolfi, A. (2001). Continuing education offering: Assessment and treatment of HIV-related fatigue. *Association of Nurses in AIDS Care*, 12, 29–34. doi:10.1016/S1055-3290(06)60155-6.
- Adrien, A. (1993). Quebec after a decade of epidemic HIV infections: What is the status of interventions in health promotion? *Canadian Journal of Public Health / Revue Canadienne de santé publique*, Jan-Feb; 84 (suppl. 1), S42–45.
- Adrien, A., Leaune, V., Remis, R.S., Boivin, J.-F., Duperval, R. & Noel, G.E. (1999). Migration and HIV: An epidemiological study of Montréalers of Haitian origin. *International Journal of STD & AIDS*, 10, 237–242.
- (The) African and Caribbean Council on HIV/AIDS in Ontario (ACCHO). (2006). *AIDS 2006 African/Black stream: Bringing the hidden epidemic to an international audience*. Toronto: ACCHO. Retrieved from www.accho.ca/pdf/Report%20on%20the%20AIDS2006%20African_Black%20Diaspora%20Stream.pdf
- Alain, N. (2010, February 1). Personal communication.
- All-Party Parliamentary Group on AIDS (APPG). (2003). *Migration and HIV: Saving lives in Britain. An inquiry into the impact of the UK nationality and immigration system on people living with HIV/AIDS*. London: APPG.
- Anand, S., Peter, F. & Sen, A. (2004). *Public Health, Ethics, Equity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bailey, T.M., Caulfield, T. & Ries, N.M. (2005). *Public Health Law and Policy in Canada*. Markham: LexisNexis Canada.
- Becker, M.H. (1986). The tyranny of health promotion. *Public Health Review*, 14, 15–23.
- Bibeau, G. (1991). *L'Afrique, terre imaginaire du sida: La subversion du discours scientifique par le jeu des fantasmes*. *Anthropologie et Sociétés*, 15, 125–147.
- Biehl, J., Good, B. & Kleinman, A. (Eds.). (2007). *Subjectivity. Ethnographic investigations*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bisailon, L.M. (2009). *Cordon sanitaire ou politique saine? La politique de dépistage obligatoire pour le VIH/sida et les nouvelles arrivantes au Canada*. Presentation at "Femmes immigrantes et défis pour la santé" of the 77th annual Association francophone pour le savoir (ACFAS) conference, Ottawa, May 12.
- . (2008a). *The journeys of refugee women managing HIV in Canada*. Presentation at the 11th annual interdisciplinary graduate conference, "Academics in the community," University of Ottawa, Ottawa, February 7.
- Bisailon, L.M. (2008b). Refugee + support project. *Network*, 10, 25–26. Retrieved from www.cwhn.ca/network-reseau/10-2/10-2pg9.html
- Blais, L. (2008). *Marchandisation de la santé et production de l'insécurité*. In E. Gagnon, Y. Pelchat & R. Edouard (Eds.), *Politiques d'intégration, rapports d'exclusion. Action publique et justice sociale* (pp. 69–83). Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval.
- Blais, L. & Mulligan-Roy, L. (2001). *Sociologie et maladies mentales*. In P. Lalonde, F. Grunberg & J. Aubut (Eds.), *Psychiatrie clinique, approche bio-psycho-sociale* (pp. 1632–1646). Montréal: Gaëtan-Morin.
- Butler, J. (1997). Sovereign performatives in the contemporary scene of utterance. *Critical Inquiry*, 23, 350–378.
- Canada. Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC). (2002). *Operational processing instruction 2002-004. Medical assessment of HIV positive applicants*. Ottawa.
- Canada. Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC). (2009). *Population-specific HIV/AIDS status report. People from countries where HIV is endemic-Black people of African and Caribbean descent living in Canada*. Ottawa: PHAC. Retrieved from www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/aids-sida/publication/ps-pd/africa-caribbe/index-eng.php
- Canada. Statistics Canada. (2006). *2006 Census. Immigration in Canada: A portrait of the foreign-born population, 2006 census: highlights*. Retrieved from www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2006/as-sa/97-557/p1-eng.cfm
- Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network (CHLN). (2009). *Canada's immigration policy as it affects people living with HIV/AIDS*. Toronto: CHLN. Retrieved from www.aidslaw.ca/publications/publicationsdocEN.php?ref=97
- Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network. (2004). *A plan of action for Canada to reduce HIV/AIDS-related stigma and discrimination*. Toronto: CHLN. Retrieved from www.aidslaw.ca/publications/publicationsdocEN.php?ref=48
- Canadian Public Health Association (CPHA). (2006). *Leading together: Canada takes action on HIV/AIDS (2005-2010)*. Ottawa: CPHA.
- Chitereka, C. (2009). The impact of globalization on social work education and practice: The case of developing countries. *Canadian Social Work / Travail social canadien*, 11, 40–52.

- Clatts, M., Dean, S. & Tortu, S. (1991). What's in a name? *La construction sociale du risque du sida chez les consommateurs de drogue à Harlem. Anthropologie et sociétés, 15*, 37–52.
- Committee for Accessible AIDS Treatment (CAAT). (2008). *Transformation through collective action: Best practices in migration, HIV and mental health. Summary Report*. Toronto, ON: CAAT. Retrieved from http://orders.catie.ca/product_info.php?products_id=25345.
- Coker, R. (2006). *Migration, public health and compulsory screening for TB and HIV*. (Asylum and Migration Working Paper 1). London: Institute for Public Policy Research. Retrieved from www.ippr.org/publicationsandreports/publications.asp?title=&author=coker&pubdate=&theme=&search=search
- Corin, E. (2007). The “other” of culture in psychosis. The ex-centricity of the subject. In J. Biehl, B. Good, & A. Kleinman (Eds.), *Subjectivity. Ethnographic investigations* (pp. 273–314). Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Crawford, A.M. (1996). Stigma associated with AIDS: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 26*, 398–416.
- De Bruyn T. (2004). *A plan of action for Canada to reduce HIV/AIDS-related stigma and discrimination*. Montréal: Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network. Retrieved from www.aidslaw.ca/publications/publicationsdocEN.php?ref=48
- Derlega, V.J., & Barbee, A.P. (Eds.). (1998). *HIV and Social Interaction*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Desjarlais, D.C., Galea, S., Tracy, M., Tross, S. & Vlahov, D. (2006). Stigmatization of newly emerging infectious diseases: AIDS and SARS. *American Journal of Public Health, 96*, 561–567.
- Doyal, L. (1995). *What Makes Women Sick: Gender and the Political Economy of Health*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Dubos, R. (1961). *Mirage de la santé*. Paris: Denoël.
- Duchesneau, C. (2004). Lessons learned in working with HIV/AIDS African refugees and illegal immigrants in an out-patient hospital setting. *Intervention, 120*, 47–53.
- Duffy, L. (2005). Suffering, shame, and silence: The stigma of HIV/AIDS. *Journal of the Association of Nurses in AIDS Care, 16*, 13–20.
- Elliott, G.C., Ziegler, H.L., Altman, B.M. and Scott, D. R. (1986). Understanding stigma: Dimensions of deviance and coping. *Deviant Behavior, 3*, 275–300.
- Falconer, D.A. (2005). *Springboard a national HIV/AIDS strategy for black Canadian, African and Caribbean communities project: Environmental scan report*. Prepared for the Interagency Coalition on AIDS and Development (ICAD). Ottawa.
- Farmer, P. & Kleinman, A. (1998). AIDS and human suffering. In P. J. Brown (Ed.), *Understanding and Applying Medical Anthropology* (pp. 333–342). Mountain View: Mayfield.
- Fife, B.L. & Wright, E.R. (2000). The dimensionality of stigma: A comparison of its impact on the self of persons with HIV/AIDS and cancer. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 41*, 50–67.
- Fortin, M.-C. (2005). *Le déséquilibre du pouvoir dans les relations de sexe et la qualité de vie: Le cas des femmes immigrantes séropositives de Québec et de Montréal*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Université Laval, Québec.
- Galabuzi, G.E. & Labonte, R. (2002). *Social inclusion as a determinant of health*. Presentation at the Social Determinants of Health Across the Life-Span Conference of the National Anti-Racism Council of Canada (NARCC), Toronto, November. Retrieved from <http://action.web.ca/home/narcc/attach/Social%20Inclusion%20as%20a%20Determinant%20of%20Health1.pdf>
- Gastaldo, D. (Ed.). (2004). *I'm not the woman I used to be: 30 poems by recent immigrant women*. Toronto: Women's Health in Women's Hands Community Health Centre.
- George, C., Husbands, W.C., Adam, B., Remis, R., Rourke, S., Beyene, J. & Makoroka, L. (2008). *Mabwana: Who are the black men who have sex with men in Toronto?* Presentation at the Canadian Association of HIV Research (CAHR), Montréal, QC, March. Retrieved from www.pulsus.com/cahr2008/abs/232.htm
- Gilmore, N. & Somerville, M.A. (1994). Stigmatization, scapegoating and discrimination in sexually transmitted diseases: Overcoming “them” and “us.” *Social Science & Medicine, 39*, 1339–1358.
- Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.
- Goldstein, D.E. (2004). *Once upon a Virus: AIDS Legends and Vernacular Risk Perception*. Logan: Utah State University Press.
- Gostin, L.O. (2004). *The AIDS pandemic. Complacency, Injustice, and Unfulfilled Expectations*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

- Goupil, I. (2002). *Expérimentation d'un groupe d'aide mutuelle auprès de mères séropositives, selon une approche féministe*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Université Laval, Québec.
- Haag, D. & Gilbert, M. (2007). *Trends in HIV positive immigrants and reporting by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) 2000-2007*. Vancouver: BC Centre for Disease Control.
- Herek, G.M. & Glunt, E.K. (1988). An epidemic of stigma: Public reactions to AIDS. *American Psychologist*, 43, 886–891.
- Hogan, K. (2001). *Women Take Care: Gender, Race, and the Culture of AIDS*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Illich, I. (1999). *Deschooling Society*. New York: Marion Boyars.
- Joint Committee on Human Rights. (2007). *The treatment of asylum seekers*. House of Lords, House of Commons. (Tenth report of session 2006–07. Volume 1. Report and formal minutes). London: The Stationery Office.
- Kaufmann, B. (2008, March 20). HIV no barrier to immigration. *The Calgary Sun*.
- Kelleher, D. (1988). Coming to terms with diabetes: Coping strategies and non-compliance In R. Anderson & M. Bury (Eds.), *Living with Chronic Illness: The Experiences of Patients and their Families* (pp. 137–155). London: Unwin Hyman.
- Klein, A. (2000). *HIV/AIDS and immigration: Final report*. Toronto: Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network. Retrieved from www.aidslaw.ca/publications/publications docEN.php?ref=103
- Labonte, R. & Schrecker, T. (2007). Globalization and social determinants of health: Introduction and methodological background. *Globalization and Health*, 3(5). doi:10.1186/1744-8603-3-5.
- Lacroix, M. (2004/05). *Les demandeurs d'asile au Canada: Quelques enjeux pour la pratique du travail social*. *Service social*, 51, 45–59.
- Lacroix, M. (2004). Canadian refugee policy and the social construction of the refugee claimant subjectivity: Understanding refugeeeness. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 17, 147–166.
- Lawson, E., Gardezi, F., Calzavara, L. Husbands, W., Myers, T. & Tharao, W.E. (2006). *HIV/AIDS Stigma, denial, fear and discrimination: Experiences and responses of people from African and Caribbean communities in Toronto*. Toronto: (The) African and Caribbean Council on HIV/AIDS in Ontario (ACCHO) and the HIV Social, Behavioural and Epidemiological Studies Unit, University of Toronto. Retrieved from www.accho.ca/pdf/hiv_stigma_report.pdf
- Leary, M.R. & Schreindorfer, L.S. (1998). The stigmatization of HIV and AIDS: Rubbing salt in the wound. In V. J. Derlega & A. P. Barbee (Eds.), *HIV and Social Interaction* (pp. 3–29). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Lefranc, H. (2007). *Rester positif. Magazine Jobboom*, 8, 16–17. Retrieved from <http://carriere.jobboom.com/marche-travail/dossiers-chauds/2007/09/08/4479826.html>
- Lévy, L. (2007). *Debout en clair-obscur*. Sudbury: *Prise de parole*.
- Madru, N. (2003). Stigma and HIV: Does the social response affect the natural course of the epidemic? *Journal of the Association of Nurses in AIDS Care*, 14, 39–48.
- Making Care Visible Research Group. (2002). *Making care visible: Antiretroviral therapy and the health work of people living with HIV/AIDS*. Prepared for the AIDS Bureau, Ontario Ministry of Health, Toronto, ON.
- Marmot, M. & Wilkinson, R.G. (Eds.). (2006). *Social Determinants of Health* (2nd Ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- McLaren, A. (1990). *Our Own Master Race: Eugenics in Canada, 1885-1945*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mensah, M.N. (2003). *Ni vues ni connues? Femmes, VIH et médias*. Montréal: Éditions du remue-ménage.
- McCann, T.V. (1999). Reluctance amongst nurses and doctors to care for and treat patients with HIV/AIDS. *AIDS Care*, 11, 355–359.
- McCoy, L. (2005). HIV-positive patients and the doctor-patient relationship: Perspectives from the margins. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15, 791–806.
- Mendès-Leite, R. & Banens, M. (2006). *Vivre avec le VIH*. Paris: Calmann-Lévy.
- Mill, J., Austin, W., Chaw-Kant, J., Dumont-Smith, C., Edwards, N., Graft, J., Houston, S., Jackson, R., Leonard, L., Maclean, L. & Reintjes, F. (2007). *The influence of stigma on access to health services by persons with HIV illness. A community-based research project. Final Research Report*. Ottawa: Canadian Institutes for Health Research.
- Moussa, H. (1993). *Storm and Sanctuary: The Journey of Ethiopian and Eritrean Women Refugees*. Dundas: Artemis.
- . (1991). Women refugees: Empowerment and vulnerability. *Refuge*, 10, 12–14.
- Munoz, M. & Chirgwin, J.-C. (2007). *Les immigrants et demandeurs d'asile, nouveaux défis. Le médecin du Québec*, 42, 33–43.

Mykhalovskiy, E. & McCoy, L. (2002). Troubling ruling discourses of health: Using institutional ethnography in community-based research. *Critical Public Health, 12*, 17–37.

Orsini, M. & Scala, F. (2006). “Every virus tells a story”: Toward a narrative-centred approach to health policy. *Policy and Society, 25*, 125–150.

Patton, C. (1986). *Sex and germs: The politics of AIDS*. Montréal: Black Rose Books.

Pittaway, E. & Pittaway, E. (2004). “Refugee woman”: A dangerous label. *Australian Journal of Human Rights, 10*, (pages unknown). Retrieved from www.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/AJHR/2004/20.html

Réseau des chercheurs africaines. (n.d.). *Santé et droits des femmes francophones de minorités raciales et ethnoculturelles issues des pays où le VIH/sida est endémique*. Report funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), Toronto.

Roth, N.L. & Hogan, K. (1998). *Gendered Epidemic: Representations of Women in the Age of AIDS*. New York: Routledge.

Rudd, A. & Taylor, D. (Eds.). (1992). *Positive Women: Voices of Women Living with AIDS*. Toronto: Second Story Press.

Saint-Jarre, C. (1994). *Du sida: L'anticipation imaginaire de la mort et sa mise en discours*. Paris: Éditions Denoël.

Schloehardt, A. (2005). Keeping the ill out: Immigration issues in Asia concerning the exclusion of infectious diseases. *Hong Kong Law Journal, 35*, 445.

Simich, L. (2003). Negotiating boundaries of refugee resettlement: A study of settlement patterns and social support. *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology, 40*, 575–591.

Sontag, S. (1989). *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and its Metaphors*. New York: Anchor Books Doubleday.

Stauffer D., Kamat, P. & Walker P. (2002). Screening of international immigrants, refugees, and adoptees. *Primary Care, 29*, 879–905.

Tessier, M. (2008, May 12). Communication with Michael Battista [Access to Information and Privacy Division, Citizenship and Immigration Canada].

Tharao, E., Massaquoi, N. & Teclom, S. (2006). *Silent Voices of the HIV/AIDS Epidemic: African and Caribbean Women in Toronto 2002–2004*. Toronto: Women’s Health in Women’s Hands Community Health Centre.

Treichler, P. (1999). *How to have theory in an epidemic: Cultural chronicles of AIDS*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Vissandjée, B., Thurston, W., Apale, A. & Nahar, K. (2007). Women’s health at the intersection of gender and the experience of international migration. In M. Morrow, O. Hankivsky & C. Varcoe (Eds.), *Women’s Health in Canada: Critical Perspectives on Theory and Practice* (pp. 221–243). Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Wagstaff, A. (2002). Poverty and health sector inequalities. *Bulletin of the World Health Organization, 80*, 97–105. doi: 10.1590/S0042-9686200200020004.

Wiebe, S. (2009). Producing bodies and borders: A review of immigrant medical examinations in Canada. *Surveillance & Society, 6*, 128–141. Retrieved from www.surveillance-and-society.org/ojs/index.php/journal/article/view/bodies/bodies

Wiebe, S. (2008). Designing bodies and borders: A review of biological screening in Canada. Unpublished master’s dissertation, University of Victoria, British Columbia.

Woodsworth, J.S. (1972). *Strangers Within our Gates*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Worth, H. (2006). Unconditional hospitality: HIV, ethics and the refugee problem. *Bioethics, 20*, 223–232.

Worth, H., Patton, C. & Goldstein D. (2005). Introduction to reckless vectors: The infecting other in HIV/AIDS law. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy, 2*, 3–14.

Zola, K.I. (1981). Culte de la santé et méfaits de la médicalisation. In L. Bozzini, M. Renaud, D. Gaucher, & I. Llambias-Wolff (Eds.), *Médecine et société dans les années ‘80* (pp. 31–51). Montréal: Éditions Albert St-Martin.

Biographical notes

Laura M. Bisailon is a doctoral candidate in Population Health at the University of Ottawa. Her CIHR- and FRSQ-funded research is an institutional ethnography of Canada’s mandatory HIV testing policy of permanent residency applicants to the country. The author holds a masters of Urban Planning from McGill University and a Bachelor of Arts in Political Studies from Bishop’s University.

Citizenship and Access

Precarious Experiences Within Canada

Susan Madore

Abstract

Trans-national migration is consistently increasing, with immigrants and refugees contributing significantly to Canada's population growth. Despite this nation's reputation for having a progressive and inclusive immigration system, a variety of structural inequalities and restrictions enlaced throughout this system have resulted in great hardship for many newcomers (OCASI, 2009). Due to a variety of unique circumstances, Canada has become home to a growing population of non-status immigrants, those who do not have the lawful legal right to live permanently in Canada (Khandor, McDonald, Nyers & Wright, 2004). Despite the growing visibility of non-status adults and children seeking refuge within Canada, state protection and social services still allow this demographic to fall through the cracks, with them often having to struggle for their basic human rights (Sakamoto, 2007). Due to the lack of identification and status documentation, non-status immigrants face immense challenges and barriers in accessing essential community services. These are the foundation of daily community life: employment, education, healthcare, community settlement and resource services, as well as police protection. An anti-oppressive practice model for social workers is proposed, as these professionals can have a significant impact upon the daily realities of the non-status population.

Keywords: Legal status • non-status • undocumented immigrant • immigrant rights • immigrant services

In light of trans-national migration trends, the number of immigrants and refugees relocating to Canada has steadily increased (Regehr & Kanani, 2006). According to a United Nations report on international migration and development, Canada is ranked seventh among 28 countries currently hosting 75% of all international migrants (2006). Despite the fact that this nation has been praised for its progressive and inclusionary immigration policies and procedures (Regehr & Kanani, 2006), immigrant populations—due to their lack of citizenship and of being recognized—have expressed immense frustration regarding the daily challenges and barriers they are forced to encounter (Omidvar & Richmond, 2005),

challenges that may significantly impact all realms of the Canadian social work profession.

Canadian citizenship and legal status

Within the context of the Canadian immigration and refugee system, the concept of citizenship is used to refer to the legal status bestowed upon individuals who are full members of the nation state (Stewart, 1995). Legal status, thus, is crucial for all newcomers entering Canada; it represents an individual's standing or position within national immigration legislation (Regehr & Kanani, 2006). One's ability to obtain legal status is fundamental,

as it places them in a hierarchy of individual rights and privileges recognized within Canadian society (Omidvar & Richmond, 2005). Such rights include political rights (i.e., the right to vote), social rights (i.e., the right to education, healthcare, etc.) and worker's rights (i.e., the right to minimum wage (Stewart, 1995). These rights establish legal status as a hidden necessity for all immigrants and refugees and "[give] rise to a language of 'needs' and 'entitlements'" which are required both for human dignity and for the possibility of individuals being effective agents in the world" (Stewart, 1995, p. 71).

Estimates reveal that the number of undocumented individuals currently residing in Canada varies immensely, from 20,000 to 500,000.

Whenever an immigrant or refugee is not recognized as possessing legal status, or has been systematically denied this classification, he or she is referred to as being non-status, also known as an "undocumented" individual (Regehr & Kanani, 2006). Non-status newcomers do not have the lawful legal right to live permanently within Canada (Khandor et al., 2004) and have been further defined as "people who cross borders without authorization, or reside and/or work without the full legal status of citizenship, or...permanent residence" (Goldring, Berinstein & Bernhard, 2007, p. 1). Non-status newcomers remain within Canada without formal identification documents, such as an immigrant visa, social insurance number card or a temporary residency card, and, consequently, live daily with the persistent risk of discovery, detention and

subsequent deportation to their country of origin (Omidvar & Richmond, 2005).

Estimates reveal that the number of undocumented individuals currently residing in Canada varies immensely, from 20,000 to 500,000 (Goldring et al., 2007; Berinstein & Bernhard, 2007), with over 50% thought to be located within the Greater Toronto Area alone (Khandor et al., 2004). This statistical variability exhibits the systematic neglect of the Canadian government to recognize this distinct population, the invisibility of which distinguishes legal status as a concealed dimension of Canadian exclusion (Goldring et al., 2007). Possession of legal status and citizenship, thus, directly impacts and determines the level of participation newcomers have within the community and plays a determining role in an individual's eligibility and overall access to national essential services (Goldring et al., 2007).

Essential services: The precarious challenges

Full-time employment plays a fundamental role for the majority of Canadian citizens. People need to earn money in order to afford the basic necessities, such as food, shelter, clothing, medicine and hot water. This reality applies to all individuals, regardless of their status. In the context of federal legislation, non-status immigrants are not permitted to obtain employment within Canada; however, the vast majority of undocumented newcomers do so anyways (Goldring et al., 2007). Many of the immigrants that relocate to Canada have extensive educational backgrounds, including years of post-secondary education and professional experience (Sakamoto, 2007). However, as revealed by Sakamoto (2007), the discriminatory reality of discounting foreign credentials strips immigrants of their qualifications and entitlement to apply for a large portion of jobs available in the national labour market. Due to this conflict with legality, non-status immigrants commonly work in the

“underground economy” (Goldring et al., 2007), occupying undocumented jobs (Keung, 2008) or, as is the case for some non-status women, enslaved within the nation’s sex trade (Omidvar & Richmond, 2005). These challenges in acquiring safe and adequate employment undoubtedly have a negative impact on non-status individuals, leading to things like mental health concerns, changes in self-identity and esteem, family distress and undeniable poverty (Sakamoto, 2007).

Another source of employment where jobs are often filled by undocumented immigrants is positions classified as temporary foreign and/or domestic work (Omidvar & Richmond, 2005). Many of these workers are in positions of extreme vulnerability, encountering harsh working conditions with minimal civic or legal rights (Omidvar & Richmond, 2005). Temporary and domestic workers in Canada have disclosed numerous unjust and disturbing conditions, while enduring consistent threats of deportation made by employers. Conditions can include illegal piecework payment, denial of medical treatment, inadequate housing and sanitary facilities, violence at the hands of supervisors (Nugent, 2008), long hours with no overtime pay (Keung, 2008) and a person may even disappear upon arrival (Keung, 2008). Further challenges include the inaccessibility to protective trade unions (Nugent, 2008) and ineligibility for workers’ compensation benefits (Khandor et al., 2004). This national program of temporary foreign employment has fostered a system that contributes significantly to maintaining the Canadian economy (Keung, 2008), while providing a “blanket of immunity” for employers who treat non-status workers with little to no respect or compassion (Nugent, 2008, p. 8).

A growing number of Canadian citizens also consider education to be a top priority and having a direct influence on an individual’s future outcome. Nonetheless, non-status immigrants often experience difficulties and fear when seeking this basic right. The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* clearly specifies

that all individuals have the right to access education, stating that participation in elementary education is compulsory (UNESCO, 2000). Even though Canada has embraced this declaration and its principals, non-status families and children have oftentimes been denied entrance into public schools (Omidvar & Richmond, 2005). These facilities have also been a source of suspicion and fear, with numerous accounts of families being reported to Canadian Immigration by school personnel.

Temporary and domestic workers in Canada have disclosed numerous unjust and disturbing conditions, while enduring consistent threats of deportation.... Conditions can include illegal piecework payment, denial of medical treatment, inadequate housing and sanitary facilities, violence at the hands of supervisors, long hours with no overtime pay, and a person may even disappear upon arrival.

Health care is another vital service. Systemic barriers limit non-status individuals from obtaining such care. The inability to provide personal documentation of Canadian residency hinders their eligibility for medical coverage. Some specific community health facilities will accommodate this population; however, these services have exorbitant waiting lists (Berinstein et al., 2006). With the recent development of initiatives such as provincial

phone-based health advisory systems (Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, 2009), non-status immigrants' access to primary and basic health care has somewhat increased; however, this minor means is not sufficient. Non-status immigrants are still largely displaced and forgotten within the healthcare realm, pushing them to rely largely on untrained members of the community for essential medical treatment (Berinstein et al., 2006).

If the fear of being reported to immigration officials does not inhibit the non-status population from seeking health care services (Berinstein et al., 2006), poverty will (Omidvar & Richmond, 2005). According to the research of Omidvar and Richmond (2005), newcomers who reside in large urban centres are at greater risk of concentrating in isolated neighbourhoods with increasing rates of poverty. This research indicates that such conditions tend to have detrimental consequences on the daily lives of Canadian immigrants (Omidvar & Richmond, 2005). Residing in such neighbourhoods is linked to greater loss of self-esteem, greater levels of family conflict and heightened feelings of despair regarding their new life in Canada (Omidvar & Richmond, 2005). These residential realities, along with minimal levels of income, make it quite difficult, and almost impossible, for undocumented individuals to avail themselves of emergency medical services and who subsequently become saddled with the very high cost of these services (Goldring et al., 2007).

Due to the consistent cuts in government spending, a large proportion of community supportive services and facilities have adopted strict regulations for the requirement of personal identification (Omidvar & Richmond, 2005). Essential services and programs such as shelters, food banks and recreational centres are often required to serve particular geographic locations (Khandor et al., 2004). The existence of these mandated boundaries and catchment populations cause community agencies to emphasize the need for user documentation (Goldring et al., 2007).

Immigrant settlement organizations operate in a very similar fashion. According to Omidvar and Richmond (2005), these services play a vital role for Canadian newcomers, oftentimes being culturally sensitive and initiating the development of a supportive foundation within the community. Furthermore, they stress that settlement support is essential for "immigrants' economic success and sociopolitical inclusion" (p. 162). Despite the increasing need for such supports, government funding often does not permit settlement organizations to assist individuals without full legal status, forcing them to deny services (Goldring et al., 2007).

Illicit acts, such as loitering or jaywalking, have resulted in tremendous negative consequences for non-status immigrants, fostering an ever-increasing distrust in community supports and service personnel.

Despite the immense barriers that inhibit non-status individuals and families from accessing services, national research has revealed that the lack of daily safety and public protection experienced by this group has fostered chronic and paralyzing fear (Berinstein et al., 2006). Undocumented newcomers are indirectly forced to remain isolated and hidden within Canadian society as a means of avoiding arrest, detention and deportation by immigration authorities (Kamal & Lehmann, 2008). This harboured fear unequivocally impacts simple daily tasks, such as walking across the street, driving in traffic and shopping for basic necessities. As stated by Berinstein et al. (2006), illicit acts, such as loitering or jaywalking, have resulted in

tremendous negative consequences for non-status immigrants, fostering an ever-increasing distrust in community supports and service personnel.

Social work initiatives: The fight for inclusion

According to Sakamoto (2007), the challenges and barriers experienced by non-status newcomers can be best addressed by the social work profession by adopting an anti-oppressive practice model. This model requires individual workers to continually engage in a process of critical consciousness (Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005), while simultaneously practising in a culturally competent manner (Williams, 2006). Critical consciousness is the “process of continuous reflection upon and examining how our own biases, assumptions and worldviews affect the way we perceive differences and power dynamics” (Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005). Through engaging in such reflection, social workers can become more aware of the power differentials existing within service provision and, thus, gain a greater understanding of how these differentials may consequently lead to oppressive (Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005) and inhumane practices (Sakamoto, 2007).

Cultural competence also insists that social workers perform with values, attitudes and skills that will insure adequate and effective service provision to all Canadian newcomers, who originate largely from a vast array of ethnic and cultural backgrounds (Williams, 2006). It is essential that social workers become educated about and familiarize themselves with the structural nature of the struggles associated with the immigration and refugee determination process as well as the indirect consequences that accompany transnational migration, including family breakdown, separation trauma, depression, integration difficulties, social isolation, psychological ramifications and financial struggles (Lacroix, 2002). Workers can start by exploring a few vital resources, including Citizenship and Immigration

Canada, the Canadian Council for Refugees, the Solidarity Across Borders Network, the Human Rights Action Committee and local community immigration settlement centres.

Social workers can also foster greater equity for non-status populations by evaluating the community agencies and services in which they work. The formal missions and mandates embraced by local support organizations often neglect to recognize the unique challenges and needs of undocumented newcomers (Berinstein et al., 2006). These professionals need to realize how truly inequitable community services can be and take action to foster inclusive programs that do not discriminate against those who often need the most support.

Lobbying for policy change is another fundamental action that social workers can undertake. Workers can collaborate with a variety of advocacy and interest groups for the adoption and implementation of anti-oppressive social policies within municipal, provincial and federal social structures (Sakamoto, 2007). The Don't Ask, Don't Tell (DADT) campaign in Toronto (Kamal & Lehmann, 2008) is one prime example of progressive social advocacy. The aim of the DADT campaign is to encourage local social services and agencies to adopt a DADT policy (Goldring et al., 2007), prohibiting service providers from inquiring about an individual's legal status or disclosing their status to immigration authorities (Kamal & Lehmann, 2008). The ongoing development of DADT policies has significantly reduced the risk and fear experienced by undocumented individuals and has encouraged this population to avail itself of local services and supports. Additional migrant justice organizations and initiatives include the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants' STATUS campaign and No One Is Illegal's Status for All campaign in Montréal, Toronto and Vancouver.

Through the use of migrant justice organizations, increased cultural competence and anti-oppressive approaches, social workers can extend their professional capacities to

address the numerous, marginalizing and complex barriers that hinder undocumented individuals from actively participating in community life. Social workers need to be aware of existing power differentials and critically analyze the services they provide, ensuring they do not contribute to a system that continues to isolate and discriminate against this disadvantaged population, which strips them of their basic entitlements, freedoms and human rights. It is only through such actions that community experiences of non-status individuals in Canada will change, encouraging this demographic to fully engage as citizens and righteously reclaim their presence within Canadian society.

References

- Berinstein, C., McDonald, J., Nyers, P., Wright, C., & Zerehi, S. (2006). *Access not fear: Non-status immigrants & city services*. Toronto: Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants.
- Goldring, L., Berinstein, C., & Bernhard, J. (2007). *Institutionalizing precarious immigration status in Canada*. Toronto: CERIS—The Ontario Metropolis Centre.
- Kamal, F., & Lehmann, K. (2008). *Regularization from the ground up: The don't ask don't tell campaign*. Toronto: No One Is Illegal—Toronto.
- Keung, N. (2008, March 15). Guest labour program raises troubling questions. *Toronto Star*. Retrieved March 8, 2008, from www.thestar.com/article/346401
- Khandor, E., McDonald, J., Nyers, P., & Wright, C. (2004). *The regularization of non-status immigrants in Canada 1960–2004: Past policies, current perspective, active campaigns*. Toronto: Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants.
- Lacroix, M. (2002). Refugee claimants and social work practice: Toward developing a new knowledge base. *Canadian Social Work / Travail social canadien*, 4(1), 85–93.
- Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. (2009). *Local Health Systems Integration Act, 2006*. Retrieved March 17, 2009, from Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care website: http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/public/legislation/lhins/hu_lhins.html
- Nugent, J. (2008). *Canadian seasonal agricultural workers program: A 'blanket of immunity' to abuse workers*. Toronto: No One Is Illegal Toronto.
- Omidvar, R., & Richmond, T. (2005). Immigrant settlement and social inclusion in Canada. In T. Richmond & A. Saloojee (Eds.), *Social Inclusion: Canadian Perspectives* (pp. 155-179). Halifax: Feinwood Publishing.
- Regehr, C., & Kanani, K. (2006). *Essential Law for Social Work Practice in Canada*. Don Mills: Oxford University Press.
- Sakamoto, I. (2007). A critical examination of immigrant acculturation: Toward an anti-oppressive social work model with immigrant adults in a pluralistic society. *British Journal of Social Work*, 37, 515–535.
- Sakamoto, I., & Pintner, R. (2005). Use of critical consciousness in anti-oppressive social work practice: Disentangling power dynamics at personal and structural levels. *British Journal of Social Work*, 35, 435–452.
- STATUS. (2006). Retrieved February 26, 2009, from Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants website: http://www.ocasi.org/downloads/STATUS_Regularization_Proposal_Jun06.pdf
- Stewart, A. (1995). Two conceptions of citizenship. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 46(1), 63–78.
- UNESCO. (2000). *World education report: The right to education, towards education for all throughout life*. UNESCO Publishing.
- United Nations. (2006). *Globalization and interdependence: International migration and development*. United Nations Publications, Sales No. A.60.871.
- Williams, C. (2006). The epistemology of cultural competence. *Families in Society*, 87(2), 209–219.

Biographical notes

Susan Madore received a BSW from Memorial University and an MSW from the University of Toronto, with a specialty in diversity and social justice. She currently practices in the field of community development, mobilization and capacity building with Western Health in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Precarious Migratory Status in Canada

Implications for Social Work and Social Service Delivery

Rupaleem Bhuyan • Tracy Smith-Carrier

Abstract

Canada, like other immigrant-receiving states, welcomes migrants for economic, family and humanitarian reasons. Despite overtures to welcome immigrants as permanent residents, however, Canada has a growing population of people living with precarious migratory status—forms of insecure and irregular migrant status including refugees, temporary workers, and non-status immigrants. This article examines the implications that precarious migratory status has for social work and social service delivery in Canada. This research is part of a larger study designed to explore the construction of social rights in public policy and social service delivery. In this article, we highlight our findings from interviews with service providers who work with a particularly vulnerable group of migrants—women seeking shelter from domestic violence. We present our analysis of the strategies employed by service providers to maximize social rights for migrants while mitigating the ill effects of immigration enforcement. Our research indicates that amidst economic and political pressure to restrict social entitlements overall, it is imperative that social workers and other service providers organize across service sectors to develop individual, organizational, and policy alternatives to redress the current state of injustice facing migrants with precarious status in Canada.

Keywords: Precarious migratory status • immigration • social rights • service delivery • violence against women

While Canada has historically welcomed immigrants for economic, family and humanitarian reasons, a growing proportion of people living in Canada have precarious migratory status—forms of insecure and irregular migrant status (Bernhard, Landolt & Goldring, 2009; Goldring, Bernstein & Bernhard, 2007). Precarious migratory status (henceforth referred to as “precarious status”) invokes uncertainty in the right to reside in Canada, while restricting the social entitlements a migrant can claim from the state (e.g. housing, social assistance, healthcare). Groups with precarious status include refugee

claimants, temporary workers, and non-status residents. Withholding basic social, political and civil rights from people residing within a nation raises social justice concerns and erodes the baseline definition of social inclusion in Canada (Basok, 2002; Omidvar & Richmond, 2003; Saloojee, 2003).

This article discusses the implications that precarious status in Canada has for social work and social service delivery. This research is part of a larger study designed to explore the construction of social rights in public policy and social service delivery in Canada. In this article, we highlight our findings from interviews with

Table 1
Permanent resident and temporary resident categories and percentages for 2008

Permanent residents			Temporary residents		
Category	Number	%	Category	Number	%
Family class	65,567	26.5	Foreign workers	363,494	41.3
Economic immigrants	149,072	60.3	Foreign students	242,861	27.6
Refugees	21,860	8.8	Humanitarian population	124,835	14.2
Other immigrants	10,742	4.3	Other	148,451	16.9
Total	247,243	100	Total	879,641	100

Adapted from CIC (2009)

service providers in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) who work with a particularly vulnerable group of migrants—women seeking shelter from domestic violence (Alaggia, Regehr & Rischynski, 2009; Salcido & Adelman 2004). We present our analysis of the strategies employed by service providers to maximize social rights for migrants while mitigating the ill effects of immigration enforcement.

Background

Migration and immigration policy in Canada

Pressures related to neoliberal restructuring and increased transnational mobility have contributed to new waves of migration. In response, states have adopted strategies to restrict migrants and their claims to the social rights associated with liberal democracy (Calavita, 2005). Canada offers three primary channels for immigration via employment, family reunification, and humanitarian relief (See Table 1 for 2008 figures).

The proportion of permanent residents as a percentage of Canada’s population has remained consistent in recent years, ranging from 0.7% to 0.9% between 1990 to 2008. The number of authorized temporary

residents was stable during the 1990s—averaging 492,283 people per year—but has risen steadily since 2000 at an average rate of 5% each year to a total of 879,641 temporary residents in 2008 (See Table 2).

While the temporary foreign worker program has grown, the Canadian immigration system—which includes the bureaucracies of Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Canada Border Service Agency (CBSA), and the Immigration and Refugee Board—has augmented measures to deter asylum seekers and irregular migrants (i.e. those who do not qualify for the established immigration paths into Canada). Crépeau and colleagues argue that strategies to discourage immigration include: “faster refugee determination, elimination of appeals, restricted access to the labour market, reduced legal aid and social protection, increased detention... excessive penalties for migrant smuggling and safe third-country agreements” (Crépeau, Nakache & Atak, 2007, p. 319). Each of these measures contributes to political, economic, and social barriers that people with temporary or precarious migratory status face when seeking to obtain legal permanent residency.

Increased scrutiny of immigrants is bolstered by measures to monitor citizenship identity in the everyday functions of civic life.

For example, citizenship identity is now an assumed part of demonstrating eligibility for public benefits. In turn, specific forms of identity—the provincial health card and driver’s licence—have become mechanisms to deny access to services such as emergency shelter and food banks. While verifying identity may be a useful strategy to screen for eligibility, inability to document identity may disenfranchise citizens as well as immigrants (Bhuyan, 2010; Wilson, 2009).

This research is part of a broader effort among service providers, community activists, and academics to address the socio-cultural and legal barriers that impede migrants from accessing social and health services (Berinstein, McDonald, Nyers, Wright & Zereh, 2006; McDonald, 1999; Smith, 2004). This study received support from CERIS–The Ontario Metropolis Centre with support from community partners based in social service organizations in the GTA¹. The objective of the study is to understand the social rights

of people who reside in Canada but are not granted citizenship or lawful permanent residence. Specifically, the study explored: a) How are social rights constructed for people with precarious status in federal, provincial, and local laws? b) How do service providers respond to women who have precarious status in times of crises related to domestic violence?

Theoretical framework

Drawing upon governmentality scholarship and theories of power (Foucault, 1979, 1980; Rabinow, 1984), we analyze how multiple interests in public policy affect efforts to regulate migrants and their participation in society (Grewal, 2005; Ong, 1996, 2003). In this framework, individuals—service providers, services users, policy makers—regulate themselves and others to adhere to principles of market participation and democratic rights and freedoms. The discretionary power that

Table 2
Growth in temporary residents from 2000 to 2008

Year	Number of temporary residents	Increase from previous year	% increase from previous year
2000	588,935	59,717	10.0
2001	643,922	54,987	9.0
2002	670,112	26,190	4.0
2003	682,957	12,845	2.0
2004	708,781	25,824	4.0
2005	726,781	18,000	2.0
2006	752,521	25,740	3.0
2007	799,696	47,175	6.0
2008	879,641	79,945	9.0
Average growth per year		38,936	5.0

Adapted from CIC (2009)

front-line workers hold, presents a site where governance is practiced in everyday interactions between service providers and service users. Lipsky’s (1980) analysis of front-line workers—service providers who work directly with service users/clients in the delivery of social services—illustrates that each encounter a person has with a social worker “represents a kind of policy delivery” (p. 3). Given the autonomy and vast discretionary powers front-line workers wield, they play a critical role in deciding who may or may not benefit from social rights (Lipsky, 1980).

We examine immigration policy as a form of structural violence that involves intersecting forms of oppression. Feminist activism in the battered women’s movement revealed how unequal social relations fuel gender based violence (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). The focus on gender, however, must also include examination of the myriad facets of identity (i.e. race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, ability, socioeconomic status) that contribute to women’s experience of and response to violence (Siltanen & Doucet, 2008).

Methodology

The study employs an interpretive policy analysis research design; framed by theories of meaning making in public policy (Yanow, 2000). This mode of analysis utilizes a mixture of methods to identify and gain exposure to the process and effects of policy development and implementation. Using principles of discourse analysis (Allen, 1995), we examine what social rights were discussed in key informant interviews. Semi-structured interviews lasting 1-2 hours were conducted with key informants who are management staff (n=4); front-line workers (n=4) at Violence against women (VAW) shelters; and funding administrators (n=2) who work in organizations that provide funding to VAW shelters in the GTA. These conversational interviews explored how service provision is impacted by immigration status, the management of sensitive identity information,

and immigration enforcement practices in VAW shelters.

We examine immigration policy as a form of structural violence that involves intersecting forms of oppression. Feminist activism in the battered women’s movement revealed how unequal social relations fuel gender-based violence.



Findings

Social rights in Canada

Immigrants have benefited by and large from the extension of social entitlements and civil rights that took place in the 1970s. Immigrants’ social rights in Canada vary according to their legal status and length of residence in Canada. In their cross-national comparison of social rights for migrants, Fix and Laglaron (2002) illustrate the various forms of safety nets, social insurance, and social investments that immigrants and migrants may access, depending on the administration of programs at the provincial and municipal levels (see Table 3). Their analysis did not account for undocumented immigrants, who were assumed to be ineligible to most social entitlement programs. Refugees granted status in accordance with The Geneva Convention are accorded equal treatment as citizens with respect to public assistance and social security benefits (Sainsbury, 2006). Whilst refugee claimants whose application is in process are granted basic social and economic rights, all other people with precarious status are offered

Table 3
Social entitlements and benefits eligibility in Canada

		Status	Non-permanent residents			Landed immigrants			Citizen
			Student permit	Temporary workers	Asylum seekers and de facto refugees	Recognized refugees	LPR family class*	LPR non-family class	
Safety net	Social assistance—municipal	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	
	Rent subsidy	No	No	Yes (depending on region)	Yes (depending on region)	No	Yes	Yes	
	Housing assistance—municipal & provincial	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	
	Child tax benefit	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Social insurance	Health care and insurance—provincial or interim federal health	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
	Old age security	N/A	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	
	Employment insurance	No	Yes	Limited	Limited	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Social investments	Immigrant settlement and adaptation program	No (University can grant a subsidy and permit work on campus)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A	
	Grants or loans for higher education—provincial	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	
	Education for children—provincial	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
	Job training	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	
	Access to labour market	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Restricted	Open	Open	Open	

* LPR: Landed Permanent Residents. Source: Fix and Laglagron, 2002

minimal or no claims to social entitlements. Because social rights are tied to one’s legal status in the Canadian immigration system (Crépeau, 2005), any change in immigration status ultimately shifts the social rights to which one is entitled. The shifting vision of obtainable rights associated with immigration status were expressed in the following statement by a shelter advocate:

Priorities change as soon as people’s status changes as well. When you do not have status any small thing is a big thing, is a big deal. If you get just a little appointment at the community health centre, it’s a big achievement, when you do not have status. When you are a refugee claimant, you have access to medical attention, but you want to go to university. So that’s your dilemma. When you’re a [legal permanent] resident, you can now access medical attention, but you want to leave the country more frequently. You see, people’s priorities change when their status changes.... Citizens have such high expectations in terms of what they want to achieve. So different from the person without status. It is heart breaking....Once you are in the ground level, anything would be a benefit. But it shouldn’t be that way. Because medical attention for a pregnant woman shouldn’t be a privilege, it should be a right. (Shelter Advocate)

Service delivery to women with precarious status in VAW shelters

Violence against women shelters in the GTA regularly house women—and their children—who have precarious status including: women who no longer have status due to the expiration of a visitor visa; women in the midst of “sponsorship breakdown;” and women waiting for their refugee or humanitarian claim decision. Refugee claimants who are waiting for a Pre-Removal Risk Assessment (PRAA) decision and those whose refugee claims were denied may have a warrant for their

deportation, adding to their sense of uncertainty and fear of deportation. Most VAW shelters state that they work with women irrespective of status. However, the intake process—which may spread out over several days—generally includes asking questions about migratory status, as a way to assist a shelter resident with applying for public assistance and for general safety planning.

Due to the large proportion of residents with immigration issues, shelter staff must often function as immigration advocates. Shelter staff and management staff, however, have varying levels of knowledge and strategies about how to connect women with legal immigration advice and how to obtain legal aide certificates.



Most women residing in VAW shelters are accompanied by children, who may also have precarious immigration status or who may be Canadian citizens. As a result, mixed-status among family members is a common feature in VAW shelters. Women without status are generally unable to support their children’s claims to rights associated with citizenship (Fix & Zimmermann, 1999). For example, shelter staff in our study reported that Canadian born children who have one or more parents with precarious status are regularly denied access to social entitlements—subsidized housing, the provincial health insurance, and the Child Tax Benefit.

Due to the large proportion of residents with immigration issues, shelter staff must

often function as immigration advocates. Shelter staff and management staff, however, have varying levels of knowledge and strategies about how to connect women with legal immigration advice and how to obtain legal aide certificates. In one shelter, a front-line staff person was a former immigration paralegal, so could assist women in filling out applications and making informed decisions about immigration options. Other staff relied on pro-bono immigration lawyers who could consult with residents who might be interested in applying for a refugee or humanitarian claim. While all shelter staff talked about the significant challenges facing women with precarious status, they also spoke about their efforts to maintain hope amidst grim circumstances.

Individual advocacy might also entail brokering with immigration officials to either delay the date of deportation or to notify the CBSA of a woman's residence in the shelter, in order to secure her access to the Interim Federal Health Program.

**“I know how to pick my battles”:
Proactive and reactive
advocacy strategies**

While negotiating the complex terrain of funding, access to social services and securitization, shelter staff used both proactive and reactive strategies to secure social rights for shelter residents and deflect immigration enforcement. Advocacy with women who are awaiting a refugee claim decision are eligible for

many social entitlements like housing, health insurance, and social assistance. Supporting women without status or whose refugee claim was denied is more challenging and often requires workers to challenge polices and practices across social and health service sectors; to secure entitlements for all shelter residents.

Proactive strategies refer to the ways in which front-line workers support women to access social or health services in anticipation of denied services or detection by immigration enforcement. In some cases, service providers explored opportunities unique to a woman's case—asking a friend who is a dentist to provide free emergency dental care. Individual advocacy might also entail brokering with immigration officials to either delay the date of deportation or to notify the CBSA of a woman's residence in the shelter, in order to secure her access to the Interim Federal Health Program. Proactively notifying immigration authorities that a woman is residing in a shelter was discussed as a strategy when a woman was vulnerable to detection through other service providers or her abuser. In the following excerpt, a shelter advocate clarified that she only contacts immigration authorities if she has assessed it would ultimately benefit a woman:

And I hope that there is a certain level of humanity there when they [immigration authorities] are receiving information because I'm not calling about any criminal, I'm calling about women who are having a difficult time. And I know how to pick my battles. I'm not gonna call if I feel it's not gonna fly. I know how to pick my battles. (Shelter Advocate)

While these advocacy strategies were successful for individual women, they often did not address broader structural issues of inequality or exclusion. Structural or policy advocacy did occur when shelter staff worked across the VAW sector to ensure that shelters are working together to secure entitlements or to pressure administrative leaders to extend the maximum length of shelter stay for women

without status. Many shelters, at the time of this study, were in the process of developing internal policies for responding when CBSA agents appear at the shelter to inquire about shelter residents. Other examples of proactive advocacy strategies included: shelter staff assisting all women to apply for the Personal Needs Allowance and assisting residents to relocate if they feared detection by CBSA.

Shelter staff attempted to broker with CBSA officials to delay the deportation date of a family residing in a VAW shelter so one of the older children could graduate from high school.

Some strategies employed by front-line workers and organizational policies reflected a more reactionary approach to service barriers and immigration enforcement. In some shelters, women without status are encouraged to apply for a refugee claim as a means to obtain social rights. While refugee claimants are able to apply for housing, health care, and social assistance, if their claim is denied, they may be subject to detention and deportation from Canada. In another example of defensive advocacy, shelter staff attempted to broker with CBSA officials to delay the deportation date of a family residing in a VAW shelter so one of the older children could graduate from high school:

There wasn't really a lot we could do, so we just started working with a family and at some point, they said, I mean the worker that was talking with the client said, you will be going back. It'll be sometime between this and this day. And she tried

to, we tried to negotiate because her older daughter was having her graduation ceremony on a certain day of the month and could we extend it?...So the worker was pretty up front and said it is going to happen. We tried to negotiate the dates. And first he [the CBSA officer] said yes and then, unfortunately, they switched the date and stuff. So they knew it was coming and so we did have a couple of weeks of being able to do work with her, saying good bye, and she was able to get as much stuff as she could in order, and hooking up with resources back there in terms of people that she could contact or resources that were available. So, you know, it was still a really sad situation and very frustrating for everybody because it just seemed so unjust. And she still keeps in touch at least by email to let us know what's happening. (Shelter Manager)

Although the shelter staff could not prevent the deportation, their efforts sought to minimize the trauma associated with being uprooted due to deportation. Another defensive posture was evident within an organization that preferred not to inquire details about a woman's plans to go underground following detection by CBSA agents. In many organizations, fear of losing funding and the scarcity of resources were also shared as factors that influence service delivery.

Discussion

Social workers and other service providers have been on the frontlines of welcoming immigrants to Canada and assisting in their integration and full participation in society. While immigrants in general continue to face challenges that impede their social inclusion—employment barriers, systemic racism, and poverty—immigrants with precarious migratory status are possibly more at risk, due to their legal exclusion from the social contract associated with liberal

democracy. What then are the implications for social workers in responding to the multifarious needs of immigrants with precarious status?

In Social Work's *Code of Ethics* (2005), it is unequivocal that social workers are called to "respect the unique worth and inherent dignity of all people and uphold human rights" (CASW, 2005, p. 4, emphasis added). Social workers are thus duty-bound to challenge inequality; pursuing social justice as a core objective of the profession. In recent years, however, a policy frame has proliferated which stigmatizes people living in Canada with precarious status in the parlance of illegality, queue jumping, or threats to national security (Lowry, 2002). Disparaging beliefs and judgments towards those without "legal" status abound and are by no means restricted to those outside the social work vocation. Consequently, raising awareness to the plight of immigrants with precarious status ought to be a focal imperative of the profession.

Despite the extreme vulnerability of non-status immigrants, the literature on this population remains under-researched (Bernhard et al., 2008). We need a new framework to conceptualize rights based on personhood versus citizenship, given our transforming (post)welfare state and its central foci on market citizenship (Crouch, Eder & Tambini, 2001) and securitization (Dhmoon & Abu-Laban, 2009). Notwithstanding the diversity of perspectives on who "should" have access to social rights guaranteed by the state, the exercise of discretionary powers in everyday interactions with immigrants provides social workers with tangible opportunities to advance the human rights of individuals, regardless of status. Amidst economic and political pressure to restrict social entitlements overall, it is imperative that social workers and other service providers organize across service sectors to develop individual, organizational, and policy alternatives to redress the injustice facing migrants with precarious status in Canada.

References

- Alaggia, R., Regehr, C. & Rischynski, G. (2009). Intimate partner violence and immigration laws in Canada: How far have we come? *International Journal of Psychiatry and the Law*, 32(6), 335–341.
- Allen, D. (1995). Hermeneutics: Philosophical traditions and nursing practice research. *Nursing Science Quarterly*, 8(4), 174–182.
- Basok, T. (2002). *Tortillas and Tomatoes: Transmigrant Mexican Harvesters in Canada*. Montréal: McGill-Queen's Press.
- Berinstein, C., McDonald, J., Nyers, P., Wright, C., & Zerehi, S.S. (2006). *Access not Fear*. Toronto: CERIS–Ontario Metropolis Centre.
- Bernhard, J., Goldring, L., Young, J., Berinstein, C., & Wilson, B. (2008). Living with precarious legal status in Canada: Implications for the well-being of children and families. *Refuge*, 24(2).
- Bernhard, J., Landolt, P., & Goldring, L. (2009). The institutional production and social reproduction of transnational families: The case of Latin American immigrants in Toronto. *International Migration*, 46(2), 3–31.
- Bhuyan, R. (2010). Reconstructing citizenship in a global economy: How restricting immigrants from welfare undermines social rights for U.S. citizens. *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*, 37(2), 61–84.
- Calavita, K. (2005). *Immigrants at the Margins: Law, Race, and Exclusion in Southern Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Canada. Citizenship and Immigration Canada. (2009). *Facts and figures 2008: Immigration overview—permanent and temporary residents*. Ottawa: Author.
- Crépeau, F. (2005). When recourses fail to protect: Canadian human rights obligations and the remedies offered to foreigners' immigration decisions. *European Journal of Migration and Law*, 7, 275–300.
- Crépeau, F., Nakache, D., & Atak, I. (2007). International migration: Security concerns and human rights. *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 44(3), 311–337.
- Crouch, C., Eder, K. & Tambini, D. (Eds.). (2001). Conclusions: The future of citizenship. In C. Crouch, K. Eder & D. Tambini (Eds.), *Citizenship, Markets, and the State* (pp. 261–270). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dhmoon, R. & Abu-Laban, Y. (2009). Dangerous (internal) foreigners and nation-building: The case of Canada. *International Political Science Review*, 30(2), 163–183.

Dobash, R. E., & Dobash, R.P. (1979). *Violence Against Wives: A Case Against Patriarchy*. New York: Free Press.

Fix, M., & Laglagaron. (2002). *Social Rights and Citizenship: An International Comparison*. Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute.

Fix, M.E., & Zimmermann, W. (1999). *All Under One Roof: Mixed-Status Families in an Era of Reform*. Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute.

Foucault, M. (1979). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (A. M. Sheridan, Trans.). New York: Vintage Books.

Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977* (C. G. et al., Trans.). New York: Pantheon.

Goldring, L., Bernstein, C., & Bernhard, J. (2007). *Institutionalizing Precarious Immigration Status in Canada*. Toronto: CERIS–Ontario Metropolis Centre.

Grewal, I. (2005). *Transnational America: Feminisms, Diasporas, Neoliberalisms*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Lowry, M. (2002). Creating human insecurity: The national security focus in Canada's immigration system. *Refuge: Canada's Periodical on Refugees*, 21(1), 28–39.

Lipsky, M. (1980). *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services*. New York: Russel Sage Foundation.

McDonald, S. (1999). No in the numbers: Domestic violence and immigrant women. *Canadian Woman Studies / les cahiers de la femme*, 19(3), 163–167.

Omidvar, R., & Richmond, R. (2003). *Immigrant Settlement and Social Inclusion in Canada*. Toronto: Laidlaw Foundation.

Ong, A. (1996). Cultural citizenship as subject-making: Immigrants negotiate racial and cultural boundaries in the United States. *Current Anthropology*, 37(5), 737–762.

Ong, A. (2003). *Buddha is Hiding: Refugees, Citizenship, and the New America*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Rabinow, P. (Ed.). (1984). *The Foucault Reader*. New York & London: Penguin Books.

Sainsbury, D. (2006). Immigrants' social rights in comparative perspective: Welfare regimes, forms of immigration and immigration policy regimes. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 16(3), 229–244.

Salcido, O., & Adelman, M. (2004). "He has me tied with the blessed and damned papers": Undocumented-immigrant battered women in Phoenix, Arizona. *Human Organization*, 63(2), 162–172.

Saloojee, A. (2003). *Social Inclusion, Anti-Racism and Democratic Citizenship*. Toronto: Laidlaw Foundation.

Siltanen, J., & Doucet, A. (2008). *Gender Relations in Canada: Intersectionality and Beyond*: Oxford University Press.

Smith, E. (2004). *Nowhere to Turn? Responding to Partner Violence Against Immigrant and Visible Minority Women*. Ottawa, ON: Canadian Council of Social Development.

Wilson, A.B. (2009). It takes ID to get ID: The new identity politics in services. *Social Service Review*, 83(1), 111–132.

Yanow, D. (2000). *Conducting Interpretive Policy Analysis*, 47. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Biographical notes

Tracy Smith-Carrier has a master's of social work degree and is currently a PhD candidate at the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto. She is a member of the Canadian Association for Social Work Education and is an Ontario certified teacher. Current interests include research on social inequality, welfare and immigration in neoliberal regimes.

Note

- 1 Community partners in the GTA include: *Sistering, Interim Place, Women Abuse Council of Toronto, Metropolitan Action Community on Violence Against Women, Women's Health in Women's Hands, and Nellie's*.

Some Limitations on Intracommunity Relations Among Colombian Refugees

Suggestions for Intervention with Refugees from Conflict Countries

Stéphanie Arsenault

Abstract

This research looks at intracommunity relations among Colombian refugees in Quebec, to see whether or not a transnational community exists among this group. From the information gathered, there is no evidence that such a community has been created. A shared consciousness and bond do not appear to exist between most members of this group. Factors that impede the establishment of trusting relationships include social pressures within the group, certain cultural behaviours, and, in particular, the reproduction of certain aspects of the Colombian conflict on the exiles. It seems clear that certain factors may limit the likelihood of expatriates coming together as a group, capable of effectively meeting the needs of those identified (whether rightly or wrongly) with that group. This fact must be taken into account in any intervention aimed at this clientele.

Keywords: Refugees • transnationalism • Colombia • social intervention

As part of doctoral research (completed in 2006), and in order to explore further the issue of transnational relationships developed between refugees settled in Quebec and their country of origin, the situation of Colombian refugees was analysed in depth. The research examined observable signs and practices that would show whether a transnational community exists among this population. This article particularly highlights the limitations and challenges associated with relations among Colombian expatriates in Quebec.

Background

New permanent residents of Canada have come from a variety of countries of origin over the

years, depending on Canada's expectations and on the human catastrophes occurring around the world. Decades of social, political and economic turmoil in Colombia, which worsened at the turn of the last century, have left their mark on the country, leading to a mass exodus of Colombian citizens in search of security and more humane living conditions. Since the late 1990s, more and more people from Colombia have been settling in Canada. In 2005, Colombia became the sixth most important country of origin of permanent residents in Canada; in that year alone, Canada took in 6,031 Colombian nationals (immigrants and refugees combined). The general upward trend over the last decade eased slightly beginning in 2006, and remaining at about 5,000 in 2008

(see Table 1). Most of these newcomers are refugees, and most of them settle in the province of Quebec.

Table 1
Growth in number of temporary residents
2000–2008

Year	Number	Ranking
1999	1,296	39
2000	2,228	25
2001	2,967	21
2002	3,226	16
2003	4,273	11
2004	4,438	11
2005	6,031	6
2006	5,813	9
2007	4,833	10
2008	4,995	10

Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2009

Intracommunity relations among immigrants from conflict countries: what can be learned from the literature

The objective of the research was to study the process by which Colombian refugees living in Quebec forge and maintain multidirectional social relationships that connect the society of origin with the host society (Glick Schiller, Basch & Szanton Blanc, 1999). The aim was to see whether these refugees are part of a transnational migration in which people lead lives that transcend international boundaries, rather than disconnecting completely from their community and place of origin (Besserer, 1999).

The purpose of the study was also to look more closely at the existence, or lack thereof, of

a transnational community among Colombians living in Quebec—that is, the existence of a shared consciousness, common beliefs and a bond of feeling among the majority of members of a society, regardless of the particular conditions in which the individuals find themselves (Guarnizo, Sanchez & Roach, 1999). Thus the study also examined the dynamics among Colombian expatriates in the province. It is therefore appropriate to look at what the scientific literature presents regarding intracommunity relations. The beneficial role that people from the same country of origin can play in the integration of immigrants into their new society is fairly widely documented. To name but two, the studies by Dorai (2003) and Barnes & Aguilar (2007) both deal with the ethnic community’s involvement in the newcomer integration process. Based on research findings, Dorai (2003) asserts that networks of solidarity between Palestinian refugees who settled in Europe, and those who remained in Lebanon, remain viable and active. Moreover, in the country of settlement, the strong ties maintained among people from a given village of origin in Palestine, or a given refugee camp in Lebanon, play a significant role in the successful adjustment of newcomers. In a study on the social support provided by the community for Cuban refugees in Texas (Barnes & Aguilar, 2007), respondents generally admitted that other Cubans were the main source of emotional support, and the second most important source (after settlement agencies) of more practical support in tasks such as looking for a job, learning the language of the host society, and finding accommodations.

Building, or rebuilding, a sense of community is not always easy in exile. As Eastmond (1998) mentions, in the case of refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina settled in Sweden, rebuilding a sense of community among people who have been brought together in a strange location is difficult. The local refugee collectivity is the result of administrative placements carried out by the

host country, and this collectivity consists of people from different parts of Bosnia-Herzegovina who are also often from different, and potentially conflicting, social strata or ethnic groups.

Hopkins (2006) studied Somali community organizations in London and Toronto. The Somali respondents in the study expressed concern about the ability of their respective organizations to adequately meet the needs of the Somali immigrant population. The reason for this was the continuing tensions among the various clans in the host territory. Similar observations had been made by Jacob, Bertot, Frigault & Lévy (1995) in a study done in Montréal among refugees from Bulgaria, Sri Lanka, Guatemala, Cambodia and Ethiopia.

Most of the people interviewed (31/42) had come to Canada with refugee status obtained in Bogotá, while 11 had come as refugee claimants and obtained refugee status in Canada.

Research process and description of sample

The research done was qualitative in nature, designed to elicit information from subjects and to analyze the issues under study from their viewpoint. This is an epistemological stance, which places primary importance on the views of those involved in a particular situation and their way of giving it meaning (Poupart, 1997). To this end, semi-directed individual interviews were carried out. Between December 2002 and December 2005, 42 refugees (23 men and

19 women) were interviewed in the cities of Greater Montréal (22), Québec City (12), Sherbrooke (5), and Trois-Rivières (3). All the interviews were conducted in Spanish (without the use of an interpreter) and transcribed in full. The material was analyzed with the help of the NVivo software.

Most of the people interviewed (31/42) had come to Canada with refugee status obtained in Bogotá, while 11 had come as refugee claimants and obtained refugee status in Canada. They came from 13 different departments of Colombia, and had all been in Canada for at least five years. Three non-Colombian individuals were also interviewed for their knowledge and their direct involvement with the Colombian population in Quebec. Of the refugees interviewed, more than half (27) had some university education, but the occupational, professional, economic and family profiles within the group were quite varied.

Relations among Colombian expatriates

Among the people interviewed, most had meaningful contact with at least one other Colombian national. However, the accounts gathered showed great complexity in terms of the relations established among members of the Colombian population. While some participants stressed the beneficial effects on their lives of connections made with others from Colombia, by far the most common view was one of reserve and sometimes extreme wariness. Three types of barriers were identified: those due to social pressure among expatriates with respect to the success of their integration; those due to certain behaviours associated with cultural traits; and those associated directly with the socio-political conflict in Colombia. This third type of barrier was the most widespread and had the most significant consequences. We will examine each type of barrier below.

Social pressure

The first factor identified as having the potential to interfere with the desire to establish and maintain contact with Colombian expatriates is a certain feeling of competition and envy. This is expressed in judgments that some people make about others in terms of their career success or landing a good job, or the acquisition of material goods or a house. As one female refugee noted:

My husband and I don't want to get into that dynamic of "I bought this, I bought that, I did this." As a result, we don't have many Colombian friends. Instead, I try to be friends with Canadians because they stay out of household matters.

Some former Colombians criticize their compatriots for adopting an attitude of lamentation about their new situation of life in exile, and prefer to steer clear of such an atmosphere.

(Note that all quotations given here are English translations of the author's French translations from the original Spanish.)

Social pressure can also take the form of a potentially contagious defeatism. Some former Colombians criticize their compatriots for adopting an attitude of lamentation about their new situation of life in exile, and prefer to steer clear of such an atmosphere in order to avoid being affected by it.

It's as if they came with the intention of complaining, of suffering because they are far away. They don't see the possibility of going on here, moving toward the future with confidence. Many people are

negative and they try to pass that negativism on to others. And many people let themselves be contaminated by that attitude. (Female refugee)

Behaviours or cultural traits

The second problematic factor identified by participants is the Colombian cultural trait of intrusion into other people's lives ("el chisme," or gossip), which precludes much intimacy and confidentiality within the group. Many complain that it is difficult to guarantee discretion about their personal lives when they are in close contact with compatriots, as one female refugee explained:

If I have a problem I don't want anyone to know about, I have to talk about it with a Canadian, or get help from a Canadian. If you talk to another Colombian, everyone will know about it. That's why I've kept a bit distant in this type of relations with Colombians.

Transposition of the Colombian conflict

The third type of barrier is the most widespread, and has the most significant consequences. This is the transposition of the mistrust and polarization of Colombian society to Quebec, particularly in the smaller cities. In the population studied, which consisted mostly of people who had immigrated to Canada for reasons of persecution, the reproduction of former tensions and conflicts interferes significantly with the new dynamics being created in Quebec. Some respondents even cited the reproduction of the conflict dynamic as an explanation of their decision to move elsewhere within the province.

The relationship is very problematic, as in Colombia. It's exactly the same thing. The country is totally polarized. It's transferred here 100%. That's what was happening in

that city, and I didn't have the energy to engage in that dynamic. (Female refugee)

I was terrorized! I said to my husband, "Look, we left Colombia to leave those problems behind, and we come here and find ourselves in the same dynamic, the same kind of talk, the same scenario. I felt persecuted the same way, just the same!" (Female refugee)

Many of those interviewed said that they were wary of establishing contact with other expatriates. Many opt to limit their relations with other Colombians: the relationships they do establish are very selective.

I have almost no relations with other Colombians, intentionally. I prefer not to have that source of problems, so as not to have quarrels with people, not to get into conflict, into debate. I prefer to keep to myself. (Male refugee)

That picture of our country, you can find it just the same in our city. And I think it's happening in Quebec. There have even been threats between certain people. These are complicated situations. That's why I've closed myself off, I've tried to avoid any contact [with Colombians]. (Female refugee)

In short, most Colombians generally establish only a few, very select relationships with other Colombians. It is fairly common to see people who, although they have a few limited contacts with their compatriots, choose to isolate themselves from the rest of the Colombian population.

Conclusion

In light of the information collected and the analysis done, there is no evidence that a real Colombian transnational community has been established in Quebec. No shared consciousness or bond of feeling was observed among most members of that group (Guarnizo, Sanchez

and Roach, 1999). The transposition to Quebec of the strong tensions and disagreements present in Colombian society, and the climate of mistrust that has set in among Colombian nationals, interfere with the establishment of relationships of trust among expatriates. This parallels similar situations observed among Bosnians settled in Sweden (Eastmond, 1998), and among Somalis settled in London and Toronto (Hopkins, 2006). It seems clear that certain factors may limit the probability that expatriates will come together as a group capable of effectively meeting each other's needs. In the case of Colombian refugees, factors that impede the establishment of relationships of trust include social pressures within the group, certain cultural behaviours, and most of all the reproduction of certain aspects of the Colombian conflict.

These findings pose a number of challenges for social interventions that aim to help the refugee population from a conflict-ridden country. First, practitioners should never assume a natural or automatic predisposition towards harmony among refugees; rather, they should be aware that putting nationals into contact with one another may be a significant source of stress for some. Moreover, practitioners called upon to work with such refugees need to be familiar with the socio-political and socio-cultural situations in their countries of origin. In order to assess the potential sources of disagreement, and the circumstances in which they might manifest themselves, practitioners especially need access to information on the nature of the conflicts. With respect to Colombia, it is important to emphasize the ideological and socio-political nature of the conflict. As well, practitioners should be aware that potential differences or tensions among expatriates may be apparent only through speech and discourse. Consequently, the potentially problematic nature of socio-political discussions among expatriates must always be taken into account. Knowing that the topic is likely to give rise to tensions, differences, and fears,

practitioners must carefully assess the wisdom of mentioning the political situation in the country of origin, and should address it with caution and discretion only when the time is right. Moreover, refugees should never be forced to disclose details about their identity or political opinions in a group setting, if they do not wish to do so. Working with culturally mixed groups, and matching refugees with local people of all origins, may be avenues to pursue when such situations arise.

Finally, the use of interpreters from a conflict-torn country of origin raises special challenges. While the participation of interpreters from that country cannot be ruled out, it is essential that they be recognized as neutral figures, so that newcomers will not reject their services or continue to feel insecure.

References

- Arsenault, S. (2006). *Transnacionalismo, el caso de los refugiados colombianos en Quebec*. Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Granada, Granada, Spain.
- Barnes, D.M., & Aguilar, R. (2007). Community social support for Cuban refugees in Texas. *Qualitative Health Research, 17*(2), 225–237.
- Besserer, F. (1999). Estudios transnacionales y ciudadanía transnacional. *Fronteras fragmentadas* (pp. 215–238). Michoacán: Gail Mummert editora.
- Charland, M. (2006). *La confiance au cœur de l'exil. Récit de réfugiés colombiens*. Unpublished master's thesis, Université Laval, Québec, Canada.
- Canada. Citizenship and Immigration Canada. (2009). *Facts and figures: Immigration overview—Permanent and temporary residents*. Ottawa: Government of Canada.
- Doraï, M.K. (2003). Palestinian emigration from Lebanon to Northern Europe: Refugees, Networks, and transnational practices. *Refugee, 21*(2), 23–31.
- Eastmond, M. (1998). Nationalist discourses and the construction of difference: Bosnian Muslim refugees in Sweden. *Journal of Refugee Studies, 11*(2), 161–181.
- Glick Schiller, N., Basch, L., & Szanton Blanc, C. (1999). From immigrant to transmigrant: Theorizing transnational migration. *Migration and Transnational Social Spaces* (pp. 73–105). Aldershot: Ludger Pries.
- Guarnizo, L.E., & Diaz, L.M. (1999). Transnational migration: a view from Colombia. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 22*(2), 397–421.
- Guarnizo, L.E., Sanchez, A.I., & Roach, E.M. (1999). Mistrust, fragmented solidarity, and transnational migration: Colombians in New York City and Los Angeles. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 22*(2), 367–395.
- Hopkins, G. (2006). Somali community organizations in London and Toronto: Collaboration and effectiveness. *Journal of Refugee Studies, 19*(3), 361–380.
- Jacob, A., Bertot, J., Frigault, L.-R., & Lévy, J. (1995). *The Process of Refugee Integration and Prevention and Community Intervention*. Montréal: Université du Québec à Montréal.
- Poupart, J. (1997). L'entretien de type qualitatif : considérations épistémologiques, théoriques et méthodologiques. *La recherche qualitative. Enjeux épistémologiques et méthodologiques* (pp. 174–209). Montréal: Gaëtan Morin Éditeur.

Biographical notes

Stéphanie Arsenault is a professor at the School of Social Work at Université Laval. She has a bachelor's degree from UQAM in Social Work, a master's degree from Université Laval, and a PhD in Anthropology from the University of Granada, Spain. She is particularly interested in social intervention in the context of cultural diversity.

Unaccompanied Refugee Children in Canada

Experiences of Flight and Resettlement

Myriam Denov • Catherine Bryan

Abstract

Unaccompanied refugee children represent an important, though largely invisible, population of newcomers to Canada. While a growing body of literature has begun to address the realities and experiences of children who seek asylum in Australia, Europe, and the United States, relatively little has been written about those who do so in Canada. This article aims to redress that balance. Drawing on in-depth interviews and focus groups with 16 unaccompanied children, this article highlights their experiences, perspectives, and the challenges they face with regard to flight and resettlement. While the former involves loss, fear, violence, and deprivation, the latter may present poverty, profound isolation, educational challenges, and discrimination based on ethnicity and legal status. Although many newcomer youths face similar difficulties, unaccompanied children—due to their separation from significant relationships—must contend with such issues with little or no support. While the findings highlight the significant hardships these children endure, they also reveal their agency and resilience. As social workers are often charged with the short- and long-term care of unaccompanied children, the article concludes with a discussion of the implications of these findings for social work.

Keywords: Unaccompanied minors • refugee children • Canada • flight • resettlement • challenges • social work practice

Of the approximately 18 million refugees worldwide, between 2% and 5% are estimated to be unaccompanied children—that is, individuals under the age of 18 for whom no parent or other acceptable adult was present at the time of their asylum claim. (In 1989, the United Nations defined a child as “below the age of 18.”) This figure means that throughout the world, there are somewhere between 360,000 and 900,000 child refugees who have no adult support (Montgomery et al., 2001). These children often flee their countries of origin because of war, forced military recruitment, abandonment, ethnic or political persecution, or other human rights abuses (Mann, 2001). Although most live in refugee

camp in the developing world, a small portion arrive in industrialized countries. Among refugee children, those who are unaccompanied are at the highest risk, because of the interplay between traumatic experiences and separation from significant emotional relationships (Rousseau et al., 1998). Moreover, this is a highly vulnerable group, since they lack support, are less able to advocate for themselves, and may also be subjected to human trafficking (Sadoway, 2001; Ayotte, 2001).

According to Bhabha (2001), the number of unaccompanied children applying to Canada for asylum nearly quadrupled between 1993 and 2000. Mehrunnisa et al. (2003) maintain that the number of unaccompanied children

seeking refuge in Canada increased from 368 in 1999, to 1,830 in 2002. Over that three-year period, 3,296 applications for refugee status were submitted. Relying on Citizenship and Immigration Canada data, Wouk et al. (2006) found that between the years 2000 and 2004, 0.63% of total claimants, or 1,087 people, were unaccompanied children. Boys were over-represented, and the mean age at the time of claim was 15.2 years. In that period, most children came to Canada from Sri Lanka, Burundi, and China. The first two are countries suffering from war and political violence, which the children likely fled. However, according to the professionals interviewed for this study, the motivation for children to leave China may be largely economic.

Between 2000 and 2004, 0.63% of total claimants, or 1,087 people, were unaccompanied children. Boys were over-represented, and the mean age at the time of claim was 15.2 years.



There exists a growing literature on unaccompanied children who seek asylum in Europe, Australia, and the United States (Walter, 1979; Jockenhovel-Schieke, 1986; Zulfacar, 1987; Ruxon, 2000; Goodman, 2004; Bhabha, 2004; Bean, Eurelings-Bontekoe & Spinhoven, 2006; Dalrymple, 2006; Pinto Wiese & Burhorst, 2007; Bhabha & Schmit, 2008). Little has been published on the Canadian context, however, where such children appear to be voiceless and invisible (Ali, 2006). In response, this article draws from empirical research to examine the flight and resettlement experiences of a sample of unaccompanied

children, as well as the psychosocial challenges they face following their arrival. This information is critical to social workers, who are often charged with their care, and who must be aware of and sensitive to their unique needs.

Canadian policy and procedure

In 1996, the federal government established a loose set of protocols that was intended to standardize the treatment of unaccompanied children throughout the determination process, and to guarantee their human rights as children. Nonetheless, a cohesive *federal* policy to protect refugee children has yet to materialize: formal integration programs and services are designed to address the needs of adults rather than children (Wouk et al., 2006). Similarly, child welfare services are often ill-equipped to deal with these youth. This situation is, in part, the result of jurisdictional precedent that designates immigration as a primarily federal responsibility, and child welfare as a provincial responsibility. As a result, there are considerable inconsistencies in terms of the services available across the country.

Upon arrival, unaccompanied children often live in temporary group residences for refugees or youth. If extended family is present, the child may be placed with them. In other cases, unaccompanied children in Canada may even be detained (Canadian Council for Refugees, 2004). This may occur when the child's identity or age is in question, or, in cases where trafficking is suspected, for the child's protection.¹

Once settled in Canada, asylum-seeking children are able to attend school. Formal follow-up varies by province, but is typically offered either for a year, or until the age of majority is reached. As a result, many unaccompanied children rely on informal support networks to meet their needs. In accordance with the 1996 federal protocols, once a claim for asylum has been made, a representative is designated to assist the child through the process. Despite recommendations for expedited

processes, unaccompanied children may wait several years for the outcome of their claim (Bryan & Denov, 2010). However, not all are in fact granted asylum. When this happens, there are avenues of recourse; for example, the child can apply for permanent residency under humanitarian and compassionate grounds. If this is not granted, children may, in rare cases, be deported.

Methodology

To explore the flight and resettlement experiences of this population, interviews were conducted with 16 respondents—14 male and two female—who had arrived in Canada under the age of 18. (Two came here in their twenties, but as younger children had fled, unaccompanied, to a country near their own.) At the time of the interview, nearly all respondents ranged in age from 18-30 years, except for one, who was still only 16. The participants' countries of origin included Afghanistan, Angola, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, and Sudan; their age upon leaving their own country was between 4 and 17 years. Data collection occurred in 2008-2009, and the participants were living in Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario, and Quebec.

Experiences of flight

Since the circumstances under which unaccompanied children flee their countries of origin shape migration and resettlement experiences, these should be examined carefully. In this study, all but one respondent fled because of war or persecution (the exception had been drugged and trafficked to Canada). Their journeys to safety were all marked by starvation, deprivation, and violence. To escape war-torn Sudan, one young male participant walked with a group of children to Ethiopia and then to Kenya. After spending years in a Kenyan refugee camp, he was eventually resettled in Canada. As he reports of the journey:

“[I]t was bad, what happened on my journey from Sudan to Ethiopia and then from Ethiopia to Kenya.... Most died because there was no food, no water—we survived by drinking urine. We used to walk in a long line. Whenever the lions attacked us, we would all start to cry, and we would have to climb up a tree.”

[I]t was bad, what happened on my journey from Sudan to Ethiopia and then from Ethiopia to Kenya....It's hard when you see someone dead—I grew up with these people; they were like my brothers and sisters. Most died because there was no food, no water—we survived by drinking urine. We used to walk in a long line. Whenever the lions attacked us, we would all start to cry, and we would have to climb up a tree.

Another young male participant fled the war in Angola following the murder of his mother. At the age of ten he made his way, alone, to a neighbouring country, where he lived on the streets for six years. One evening, looking for food, he boarded a ship that left port. Explaining the challenges of flight, he said:

I had come from a real war, people killing each other, and then I faced a different kind of war—learning the language, living on the street. I found this bridge, and under it was a little hole, and that was my house for six years....When they found me on the ship, they tied me up and they were going to throw me overboard.

Such experiences shape the perspectives of these child immigrants. While these participants

wanted to forget the hardships of flight during resettlement, they were often unable to do so, as one young male participant reported:

I want to forget about the pain, concentrate on the present and just forget about the past. But it's still there—I try to, but it's still there.

Challenges of resettlement

Like many newcomers to Canada, participants still felt strongly about their country and culture of origin, which one male participant described as a lifeline:

When we grew up we kept our language and our culture, and I think that's what kept us alive. It gave us something strong to hold on to, and helped us to survive every situation.

All participants were living a highly marginal financial existence: when they had jobs, these were precarious positions, earning them only the minimum wage.

It is interesting to note that maintaining their cultural identity did not occur at the expense of their developing their Canadian identity. Instead, the youth spoke of blending habits, customs, and ideas, which occurred within a context of financial, educational, and relational challenges.

Financial challenges

When they first arrived in Canada, few young refugees had anyone to turn to who could

help them understand the value of Canadian currency. As one young male participant explained, this commonly led to confusion and overspending:

Let's say I take you to Sudan and say, "This is your apartment, here is a shopping mall, here is the bank"—and then I leave you. You may have a million dollars, but if you don't know how to use the money, you won't survive. Here in Canada, I spent \$1,000 in less than a week.

All participants were living a highly marginal financial existence: when they had jobs, these were precarious positions, earning them only the minimum wage. For many, the stigma associated with social assistance, coupled with the desire to be independent, meant that they worked several jobs. Others were unemployed, or on social assistance—which, as one female participant said, was insufficient for daily living:

Today I'm supposed to be in school. But I don't have a bus pass. That's why I didn't go.

Participants reported that finding a job and keeping it was a significant challenge. One youth submitted hundreds of resumes without success, while another arrived at work one day to find he had been replaced. Limited employment opportunities, combined with little government support, means that respondents experienced chronic poverty. Despite this, however, these young people were resourceful and hard-working, and sometimes made enormous sacrifices to help one another. One male participant, who had been resettled along with other unaccompanied children, explained that the older youth worked in order to allow the younger ones to attend school:

I don't know how we survived. We made decisions according to age, who was young and who was older....The three older ones had to go to work so that the two younger ones could go to school.

Most respondents were not only supporting themselves, they were also supporting other family members in their own countries. The reality of remittance, and the stress associated with it, was significant, as one male participant outlined:

I support my brother, my brother-in-law, and his wife in Sudan, which means I have to work hard. I go to school full-time, and I have a full-time job. I sleep 2 ½ hours a night, I'm doing that to finish my schooling and keep the job. Otherwise I couldn't pay my rent and my family's rent back home—no way.

Participants stated that they would not be comfortable enjoying an acceptable standard of living in Canada, while knowing that their families were suffering:

You can never feel at ease when your people are struggling. You can go to the bank and borrow some money to buy a nice house—but I imagine where my brothers and sisters are still living, and it doesn't feel right.

Education challenges

All respondents cited access to education as one of their key expectations when they arrived in Canada. However, because of the need to support themselves, many were unable to attend school, as this female participant explained:

I really want to go to school. That is my dream. But when you don't have parents here, you have to work and take care of yourself. So everything is very difficult for me.

For those who were able to attend school, the adjustment to a new culture, language, and norms was daunting, as outlined by this male participant:

It was really hard. Closing the locker was hard, buying drinks from the machine

was hard. I think I went a week without eating lunch because I didn't know how to use the facilities.

Given that many had experienced school interruptions as a result of war, some refugees to Canada found themselves sharing a class with much younger children, as this male participant recalled:

Going to high school was a totally different experience because I had never been to school before. [I was] the oldest kid there: 17, in Grade 10. It was really hard. I learned how to sign my name. I felt like the dumbest kid in school.

Respondents reported that teachers and students alike tended to underestimate their abilities and intelligence, which they often based on these youths' accent and imperfect English or French. They also felt uncomfortable sharing their histories with their peers, as this male participant recalled:

I don't like speaking about my life too much because it's frustrating. One time I tried, and people were like "Huh?!" [tone indicating aggression, disbelief] And then I was like, "Forget it."

At times, as one young male participant observed, relationships with teachers could be strained because of misinterpreted cultural practices:

In our tradition, if you're talking to an elderly person, you don't look them in the eye, you keep your own eyes down. Here, if you don't look them in the eye, maybe you're a criminal or a gangster.

Isolation challenges

A common reflection from respondents was the isolation and loneliness they experienced in Canada. Forging new, trusting relationships was extremely difficult, for both girls and boys. As one female participant said:

I just sit at home, because I don't have any friends. I don't know how to make friends. I don't go out. I don't trust anybody. I don't get close to people.

For boys the situation is equally difficult, as this male participant observed:

I'm always in my room, doing my homework. I live with a family, but we only see each other when there's a need. They eat upstairs, and I eat downstairs. I never felt there was a friend I could talk to... When you're a refugee, you feel different.

None of the participants reported being involved in long-term programs designed to assist them or connect them with other youth in similar situations.

Discrimination and "othering"

The challenges faced by the participants were also related to prejudicial attitudes. Participants reported discriminatory attitudes by judges, social workers, and police officers. A young female participant reported an embarrassing incident:

There were these things on my body. I asked what they were, and the social worker said, "You brought that from your country. You people are always like that, with fleas."

Recalling his appearance at his refugee hearing, one male participant recounted:

My hair was in dreadlocks, and the judge commented on that. He said, "What happened to your hair?" I told him that this was my culture, and I liked it. [He laughed.]

The vast majority of male participants from African countries reported being stopped by police. Their experiences reflect findings from Wortley and Tanner's work on racial profiling in Canada (2004; 2005), which points to higher levels of police surveillance of ethnic minorities, particularly

young males. The youths' encounters with police, steeped in racism and stereotypes, were particularly painful and frustrating, as one young male participant recalls:

I was driving, and the police officer was like: "Do you know where you stopped?" And I was like, "No, officer." I was with my girlfriend, and he starts asking her: "How long have you known this guy? Is he pimping you?" Then he said: "We don't trust niggers, they're like dogs."

Negative stereotyping also informed how participants came to understand themselves. One participant described his abuse of drugs and alcohol as stemming from the expectations of his Canadian peers. More commonly, unable to dispel negative stereotypes yet unwilling to conform to them, participants found themselves to be very much alone.

Implications for social work

The barriers experienced by unaccompanied children may resemble the needs of other immigrant children. However, these youth face the additional challenges of coping not just with loss and trauma, but also with isolation, limited educational opportunities, and financial hardship. The lack of cohesive policy and programs for these youth means that social workers may find themselves ill-equipped to deal with these challenges. However, there are still some kinds of support that social workers can provide.

The trauma associated with flight and separation from family cannot be underestimated or oversimplified. Although commonalities exist, the experiences of unaccompanied children vary according to gender, social position in the country of origin, family structure, the events leading to the flight, the experiences of the flight itself, and status in the new country, including available supports. Social workers must be cognizant of these differences, and

should be aware that unaccompanied children may be fearful of discussing the actual issues of flight.

When they arrive in Canada, unaccompanied children will almost certainly require assistance in finding secure housing, learning basic budgeting skills, and navigating the refugee determination system. Although short-term housing may be provided, most participants in this study lived independently—some after only a few weeks, some after up to a year. They were often able to find themselves an apartment through service agency networks, with a landlord familiar with the circumstances of refugee youth. But such arrangements are not always possible, so social workers can help by advocating with potential landlords. Once accommodations are found, they may also serve as a mediator or advocate in the event of any difficulties.

These interviews demonstrate that for many of these young people, life in Canada is a relatively solitary one. For the first time, they must cook, clean, and budget on their own. Although it is common for most to have some cooking skills, budgeting presented a considerable difficulty. In this respect, social workers can initially offer explicit instructions about money, groceries, and other necessities, and after that, provide ongoing budgeting support.

The refugee determination process is fraught with practical challenges and emotional turmoil. Regardless of its duration, this is a precarious time. The youth interviewed here spoke of the importance of faith, education, and companionship in mitigating some of this uncertainty, and in trying to achieve a sense of permanency and security. While not all social workers will be directly involved with the process itself, they can play a crucial role in linking unaccompanied children to faith-based organizations, encouraging them in their educational endeavours, and helping them develop supportive relationships with peers and trusted adults.

Although it is important for unaccompanied children to establish meaningful relationships in Canada, it is also important to recognize that their kinship and social networks are transnational in nature. For many, contact with family abroad was extremely important. This being said, social workers must recognize that while family contacts are fundamental, some children may have fled volatile or even dangerous family situations. As well, some may have spent most of their lives away from their biological kin, and may have developed new family structures. These variations require a reconceptualization of family, one that avoids the idealization of biological kin and includes diverse relationships. Similarly, social workers must adopt a more fluid understanding of age and youth. Flight requires the shouldering of adult responsibilities, which disrupt school and other activities that typically mark the transition from childhood to adulthood. Unaccompanied children may thus occupy an ambiguous position where maturity and youthfulness intersect.

For many young refugees, the struggles of those left behind fostered a profound connection to “home.” Providing financial assistance appeared to lessen the distance separating them from their families, and allowed these young people to feel that they were “giving back” to their families and communities. When appropriate, social workers can help the youth to determine an appropriate sum of money that can be sent at regular intervals.

The connection to “home” can also be fostered in Canada through cultural and ethnic organizations. Many participants found their involvement with such organizations enjoyable: they were able to make friends and participate in cultural events. It may be beneficial to refer young people to other available resources, such as youth services, refugee and newcomer services, religious organizations, and sports clubs—all of which can offer support and

opportunities for relationship building. That said, social workers should be cautious: some youth are reluctant to participate in such activities. Ensuring that community organizations are aware of the unique needs of unaccompanied children may mitigate some of these difficulties.

Social workers must advocate for these unaccompanied children, promoting empowerment and the development of supportive services and programs. Such children may require considerable guidance in navigating their various new environments; therefore, advocacy and follow-up must be done in collaboration with service providers, teachers, school administration, police, and other professionals and relevant community members. These groups must be made aware of the practical needs of unaccompanied children, as well as their psychosocial circumstances: the traumas of flight and separation, the challenges of resettlement. Above all else, social workers must be flexible. They must be cognizant of the immense challenges these young people have faced, yet never lose sight of their resilience and resourcefulness. In order to work successfully with unaccompanied children, social workers must tap into these skills in order to enable them to meet their goals.

References

- Ali, M.A. (2006). Children alone, seeking refuge in Canada. *Refuge*, 23(2), 68–80.
- Ayotte, W. (2001). *Separated Children Seeking Asylum in Canada*. Ottawa: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Retrieved September 18, 2007 from <http://www.web.net/~ccr/separated.pdf>
- Bean, T.M., Eurelings-Bontekoe, E., & Spinhoven, P. (2006). Course and predictors of mental health of unaccompanied refugee minors in the Netherlands: One year follow-up. *Social Science & Medicine*, 64(2007), 1204–1215.
- Bhabha, J. (2001). Minors or aliens? Inconsistent state intervention and separated child asylum-seekers. *European Journal of Migration and Law*, 3, 283–314.
- . (2004). Seeking asylum alone: Treatment of separated and trafficked children in need of refugee protection. *International Migration*, 42(1), 141–148.
- Bhabha, J., & Schmidt, S. (2008). Seeking asylum alone: Unaccompanied and separated children and refugee protection in the U.S. *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, 1(1), 127–138.
- Bryan, C., & Denov, M. (2010) *Separated Children in Canada: The Construction of Risk Identity*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Canadian Council for Refugees. (2004). Impacts on children of the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*. Retrieved from www.ccrweb.ca/children.pdf
- Dalrymple, J.K. (2006). Seeking asylum alone: Using the best interests of the child principle to protect unaccompanied minors. *Boston College Third World Law Journal*, 26, 131–168.
- Derluyn, I., & Broekaert, E. (2005). On the way to a better future: Belgium as transit country for trafficking and smuggling of unaccompanied minors. *International Migration*, 43(4), 31–56.
- Geltman, P.L., Grant-Knight, W., Ellis, H., & Landgraf, J.M. (2007). The “Lost Boys” of Sudan: Use of health services and functional health outcomes of unaccompanied refugee minors resettled in the U.S. *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health*.
- Goodman, J.H. (2004). Coping with trauma and hardship among unaccompanied refugee youths from Sudan. *Qualitative Health Research*, 14(9), 1177–1196.
- Jockenhovel-Schieke, H. (1986). Realities of life and future prospects within two cultures: Unaccompanied refugee minors from South East Asia in the Federal Republic of Germany. *International Migration*, 24(3), 573–602.
- Kohli, R.K.S. (2006). The sound of silence: Listening to what unaccompanied asylum-seeking children say and do not say. *British Journal of Social Work*, 36, 707–721.
- Kumin, J. & Chaikel, D. (2002). Taking the agenda forward: The roundtable on separated children seeking asylum in Canada. *Refuge*, 20(2), 73–77.
- Maloney, S. (2001). Unaccompanied/separated children: Comparative policies and practices in North America and Europe. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 13(1), 102–119.
- Mann, G. (2001). *Networks of Support: A Literature Review of Care Issues for Separated Children*. London: Save the Children.

Martin, F. & Curran, J. (2002). Separated children: A comparison of the treatment of separated child refugees entering Australia and Canada. *International Journal of Refugee Law*. Retrieved from <http://ijrl.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/abstract/eem053v1>

Mehrunnisa, A.A., Taraban, S., & Gill, J.K. (2003). Unaccompanied/separated children seeking refugee status in Ontario: A review of documented policies and practices. *Working Paper Series: Working Paper No. 27*. CERIS: Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Settlement—Toronto. Retrieved July 4, 2006, from http://ceris.metropolis.net/Virtual%20Library/Demographics/CWP27_Ali.pdf#search=%22Unaccompanied%2Fseparated%20children%20seeking%20refugee%20status%20in%20Ontario%22

Montgomery, C. (2002). The “Brown Paper Syndrome”: Unaccompanied minors and the question of status. *Refuge*, 20(2), 56–67.

Pinto Wiese, E.B., & Burhorst, I. (2007). The mental health of asylum-seeking refugee children and adolescents attending a clinic in the Netherlands. *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 44(4), 596–613.

Rousseau, C., Said, T.M., Gagné, M.-J., & Bibeau, G. (1998). Resilience in unaccompanied minors from the North of Somalia. *The Psychoanalytic Review*, 85, 615–637.

Ruxton, S. (2000). *Separated Children Seeking Asylum in Europe: A Programme for Action*. Save the Children, Stockholm.

Sadoway, G. (2001). Canada’s treatment of separated refugee children. *European Journal of Migration and Law*, 3, 347–381.

Sourander, A. (1998). Behavior problems and traumatic events of unaccompanied refugee minors. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 22(7), 719–727.

United Nations. (1989). *Convention of the Rights of the Child*.

United Nations: Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. (1951). *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*.

Walter, I. (1979). Resettlement in the United States of unattached and unaccompanied refugee minors (1975–78) by Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service. *International Migration*, 17(1/2), 139–161.

Wortley, S., & Tanner, J. (2004, spring). Discrimination or “Good” Policing? The racial profiling debate in Canada. *Our Diverse Cities / Nos diverses cités*, 1, 197–201.

Wortley, S., & Tanner, J. (2005). Inflammatory rhetoric? Baseless accusations? A response to Gabor’s critique of racial profiling research in Canada. *Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice / Revue canadienne de criminalité et de justice pénale*, 47(3), 581–610.

Wouk, J., Yu, S., Roach, L., Thomson, J., & Harris, A. (2006). Unaccompanied/separated minors and refugee protection in Canada: Filling information gaps. *Refuge*, 23(2), 125–138.

Zulfacar, D. (1987). Alternative forms of care for unaccompanied refugee minors: a comparison of US and Australian experience. *International Social Work*, 30, 61–75.

Biographical notes

Myriam Denov is an associate professor at McGill University in the School of Social Work. She holds a PhD from the University of Cambridge, where she was a Commonwealth Scholar. Her research and teaching interests lie in the areas of child and youth studies, and international social work, with an emphasis on war and political violence, children and armed conflict, refugee youth, and gender-based violence. She has worked nationally and internationally with former child soldiers, survivors of sexual violence, and people living with HIV/AIDS. Her current research, supported by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), explores the militarization and reintegration experiences of former child soldiers in Sierra Leone. Her recent book, *Child Soldiers: Sierra Leone’s Revolutionary United Front*, is published by Cambridge University Press.

Note

¹ The detention of children for their protection is highly problematic. Front-line workers interviewed for this study spoke of children being detained with their traffickers and in several cases, of being eventually released into their trafficker’s care. Furthermore, the fact that Canadian children are not detained for reasons of “protection” points to a discrepancy in how children’s rights are implemented based on citizenship status. The use of detention with this population also illuminates the contradictory rhetoric of children’s rights and protection on the one hand, and security and immigration control on the other (see Bryan & Denov, 2010).

War and Partner Violence

Refugee Women’s Experiences and Impacts on Resettlement

Liza Lorenzetti • David Este

Abstract

As they attempt to settle in and adapt to Canadian society, refugee women may not only have experienced war or state violence, some may also be survivors of intimate partner violence. Through in-depth interviews with five refugee women, this article explores the impact of these forms of violence on the participants. Insights focused on the nature of the violence experienced, and how this impacted the women throughout the migration process, including resettlement in Canada. Implications for social work practice with this group of refugee women are also presented.

Keywords: Partner violence • refugee • resettlement • state violence • war • women

Violence against women plagues our global community. It is systemic and is perpetrated within family, community, and institutional spheres. The primary perpetrators are males, and the primary victims are women and children. War and state violence are inextricably linked to violence within the family setting (Turpin, 1998).

There are sizeable bodies of literature on partner violence, war and state violence and their impact on women. Numerous publications focus on the gendered nature of both war and partner violence, and the global experience of violence that intersects with women’s daily lives (Jacobson, Jacobs & March Bank, 2000; Watts & Zimmerman, 2002; Hynes, 2004; Caprioli, 2006; Turpin, 1998). However, there is limited literature exploring the impact of both partner violence and war on refugee women, particularly in relation to their resettlement in a new country. This study investigates these issues through in-depth interviews with five refugee women in a large urban center in Western Canada.

Literature

According to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, “at least one in three women [is] beaten or sexually abused in her lifetime” (2000; p. 1). Studies from various countries expose similar patterns of violence against women. A 2004 study entitled “Women’s and Gender Studies in English Speaking Sub-Saharan Africa” reviewed the existing social science literature on topics related to women, including partner violence. This research confirms that most countries do not have laws to protect women from violence. (Ampofo, Beoku-Betts, Njambi & Osirim, 2004).

In Bangladesh, a study using data from a population-based survey of 2,702 women and 28 in-depth interviews with survivors of partner violence, found that in both rural and urban centres, issues related to dowry or other marriage demands increased a woman’s risk of physical violence, as did a partner’s family history of wife abuse (Naved & Persson, 2005).

In Canada, 90,000 to 100,000 women and children seek refuge at women's shelters each year (Statistics Canada, 2004). A Canadian study entitled "Nowhere to Turn" explored intimate partner violence against immigrant and visible minority women in Canada (Smith, 2004). Many immigrant and refugee women experience particular vulnerabilities regarding abuse: a) lack of familiarity with their rights, law enforcement and court systems in Canada; b) social isolation that is reinforced by a lack of traditional sources of support; c) the inability to speak English or French, limiting access to services such as 911; d) economic dependency on their male partners especially if they are sponsored; and e) fear of being shunned by their ethnocultural community.

A statement by Human Rights Watch, a global human rights organization, links state, community, and partner violence by succinctly describing the various forms of violence that women experience:

We reject specific legal, cultural, or religious practices by which women are systematically discriminated against, excluded from political participation and public life, segregated in their daily lives, raped in armed conflict, beaten in their homes, denied equal divorce or inheritance rights, killed for having sex, forced to marry, assaulted for not conforming to gender norms, and sold into forced labour (2004b, p. 1).

War or state oppression, similar to male violence in the home, is based on the fundamental use of oppressive measures to attain or maintain a patriarchal framework of power inequity. A cross-national, longitudinal study by Caprioli (2006) indicated that a country or society that has a greater amount of gender inequality is more likely to engage in intrastate or international violence or conflict.

The literature indicates that while women in most societies suffer from violence by a male partner during "peacetime," family violence increases in wartime (Turpin, 1998). During wartime, the availability of weapons,

the breakdown in social structure and the ensuing trauma and brutalization of men, as well as unemployment, and substance abuse were found to worsen issues of sexual and domestic violence against women (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2004).

The complexity and pervasiveness of rape, sexual harassment, and prostitution as tools of war that intentionally target women, girls and children, are discussed extensively in recent literature (Amnesty International, 2004; Enloe, 2000; Human Rights Watch, 2004; Jacobs et al., 2000; Lorentzen & Turpin, 1998). The significant relationship between war and the control of women's sexuality and reproductive rights through the use of sexual violence is documented throughout history (Turpin, 1998).

War or state oppression, similar to male violence in the home, is based on the fundamental use of oppressive measures to attain or maintain a patriarchal framework of power inequity.

Methodology

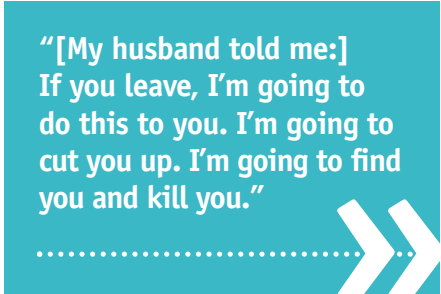
A grounded theory methodology, developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Strauss and Corbin (1994) was utilized in this study. The purpose of this research design is to generate theoretical constructs that explain the action in the social context under examination (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). In addition to grounded theory, a feminist anti-oppressive lens was also incorporated. This lens includes an understanding of violence against women as a global issue and intersecting

oppressions, as well as a respect for women's strengths and resiliency.

The primary data collection method was in-depth interviews conducted with five respondents. In the grounded theory approach, sample size is not predetermined. Rather, theoretical sampling was incorporated, whereby participants are chosen on the basis of relevant categories, issues, themes and concepts that emerge during the dual process of data collection and analysis (Charmaz, 2000; Strauss and Corbin, 1994).

Participants were from Sudan, Kurdistan/Iraq, Guatemala, Iran and the Philippines and ranged in age from 30 to 55. Each of these women survived both state/war and intimate partner violence. All of the women had children and resided in Canada for at least three years at the time they were interviewed. Each of the participants was separated or divorced.

**“[My husband told me:]
If you leave, I’m going to
do this to you. I’m going to
cut you up. I’m going to find
you and kill you.”**



An interview guide was developed by the research team that was grounded in both an initial review of the literature and the lead author's experiences as a social work practitioner working with refugee women. Participants signed consent forms. The interviews ranged from 120 to 150 minutes. Data was analyzed using the steps of open, axial and selective coding which are fundamental to grounded theory. Through the use of constant comparative analysis, emerging themes were identified, compared and clarified, deepening the authors' understanding of the data. This was done on an individual basis by each author, and then as a team.

Results

Multiple dimensions of state and family violence

Women recounted many experiences related to their survival of war or state and partner violence. These experiences created unsafe conditions at home, and forced women to assume the unlikely role of victim-protector.

The types of violence women encountered through war or by the state were numerous and multifaceted. As described by one participant:

People even reached a situation whereby they could not obtain their own food. You are moved to one shelter...because if that side is dangerous, so you move to (another) side whereby you are displaced....You cannot cultivate, you cannot farm. And hunger! Disease! Because there are no hospitals anymore. People keeping running and no one is there to attend to you. (Salma)

All respondents spoke of their experiences of abuse by a male partner. Not surprisingly, the women experienced various forms of abuse:

He got me and just the next day...he slapped me. He started the abuse already. (Elizabeth)

I felt like I was walking on eggshells.... I wasn't allowed out go out alone. (Najwa)

One of the most fundamental impacts of war and partner violence was that one's *house or home* was not a haven that could be protected:

One evening, we saw trucks loaded with soldiers and with all the machine guns they have. So they just came and broke the door and they came inside. They were all over the house. (Mary)

[My husband told me:] If you leave, I'm going to do this to you. I'm going to cut you up. I'm going to find you and kill you. (Elizabeth)

Another emergent theme was the women's efforts to keep everyone "safe," while they themselves were disempowered, vulnerable, and feared for their lives:

I was protective of my children, and I tried to protect my children—from him [husband]! Because he was so crazy. He was doing the same thing to them, if he could....I was successful most of the time, but sometimes, they would get it too. (Elizabeth)

They say there is a vaccination, but it is not vaccination. They were sterilizing children, babies...we were telling her [daughter]: "If you see somebody come, just run! Run!! (Mary)

State and family violence and the migration process

Forced migration

One of the dominant impacts of state violence is the process of forced migration. Forced migration and the difficult search for a safer or "peaceful" place to live was discussed by the women:

Women suffer. You walk miles. Some of them are pregnant, some of them with babies. You deliver anywhere, without any medical assistance. If you are lucky, you're alive. If you are unlucky, you are dead with the baby. (Salma)

Women spoke of the impact of this dislocation by relating experiences of post-traumatic stress, including depression, which some suffered once they left their countries:

For years when I came here, I had nightmares, couldn't sleep, and wake up in the middle of the night. Just close the door, make sure the doors are locked, just jump in the middle of the night and say the planes are bombing, somebody's coming to take you away or somebody's taking your kids away. (Mary)

"There were times when I was supporting myself and five more people. I didn't have eggs, flour, oil milk....And I didn't have money with me....And the sad part is, he had his money in the bank."

A precarious existence in a transit country or refugee camp prior to arrival in Canada was one of many frightening experiences voiced by the women. Living with an abusive partner while having no official status in a country was highly isolating and exacerbated feelings of insecurity:

In Turkey, I couldn't reach out (about family violence). We were only visiting.... I probably didn't have any rights there. I would not dare to do anything like that! We were just passing through, and my "ex" would—I don't know what he would do... (Elizabeth)

Resettlement

The hardships that women encountered as a result of the multi-layered impacts of state and partner violence did not cease when women arrived in their new countries of residence. In Canada, women spoke of financial challenges, difficulties with employment, language barriers and other issues related to resettlement. Meeting basic survival needs was a critical issue for several participants. "When you come here and you are all alone, you don't have a job, you don't have anything. And you have no support. You go through more trauma." (Mary)

Living with male partners who were both non-supportive and violent, exacerbated their difficult situations. As noted by this participant: "There were times where I was supporting

myself and five more people. I didn't have eggs, flower, oil milk....And I didn't have money with me. And the sad part is, he had his money in the bank." (Najwa)

Participants maintained that having a support network, financial security and, in some cases, family or relatives to act as witnesses to domestic relationships provided a certain amount of comfort, if not protection. One participant remarked: "[In my home country] I had a support system, I had a job—and I had a role to play. I had a house, so there was security around me." (Najwa)

Asking the right questions helps engage women in dialogues on these complex issues and will encourage them to share experiences in a meaningful way. Being mindful of informed, open and supportive dialogue that does not rely on stereotypes is critical.

Women spoke of the existence of protective laws and norms in Canada to support their capacity to make positive decisions for themselves and their children and help break the cycle of violence:

(In Canada) I started to change my view of women's roles. Down there, it is very traditional and abuse is seen in a different way. It's—you are abused because you're not a good woman. (Najwa)

The women found it difficult to make decisions regarding their abusive relationships, even after resettlement. They were reluctant to leave their relationships for a variety of reasons, including concerns for their children,

the family's loss of employment, their belongings and status:

Well I think, at that time, that the reason I couldn't leave him was I wasn't sure about myself yet—especially after imprisonment I lost all my self-confidence, all my self-esteem. (Parvin)

I used to feel sorry about him, because he was going through a lot....He had to leave the country and his life was threatened. And so many times I put up with a lot of stuff—a lot of emotional abuse, a lot of putting down. (Najwa)

Recommendations for service providers

The participants made several recommendations regarding services and supports designed to assist women survivors and their families. These recommendations included the importance of social or peer supports, the criticality of financial and other forms of assistance to meet basic needs, and emotional help through counseling. Moreover, the crucial role of ethnocultural communities in speaking out against violence and supporting those who are victimized was emphasized. Service providers were encouraged to become informed on the cultural background and history of their clients. Empathy, trust and caring were perceived as being of higher value than the role of the "expert" professional.

Discussion

The suffering of women and their immense courage were evident in their stories of survival and endurance. Violence against women, whether it occurred in the public domain or what is erroneously described as the "private sphere," resulted in similar impacts on women's lives. The interrelationship of war or state violence, forced migration, the insecurity of being in transit countries, along

with the ensuing problem of intimate partner violence impacted women's experiences of resettlement in Canada.

As social workers engaged in the field of violence prevention and intervention, a lack of awareness or understanding of the issues related to women's experiences of war and partner violence may limit our ability to conduct a thorough assessment and offer informed and integrated support. Asking the right questions helps to engage women in dialogues on these complex issues and will encourage them to share experiences in a meaningful way. Being mindful of informed, open and supportive dialogue that does not rely on stereotypes is critical. Social workers who are cognizant of the possible impacts of both war and partner violence and the impact on resettlement may be well positioned to engage with women and their families in ways that promote healing and personal transformation. Such a perspective is consistent with the work of writers such as Drachman (1992), Roy and Montgomery (2003), and Pine and Drachman (2005), all of whom stress that it is essential for social workers who practice with immigrants and refugees to be knowledgeable about the entire migration process and not just the resettlement phase.

From a macro perspective, this study also highlighted systemic issues such as violence against women and other forms of discrimination that impact women's experiences in their countries of origin and in Canada. The lack of employment, the inability to address basic survival needs, and the absence of a significant role in Canada all contributed to feelings of marginalization. These systemic issues, along with the strengths and challenges of those most impacted, need to be identified and addressed by the social workers working with refugee women. This important work goes beyond an awareness and understanding of the experiences of "other people." It connects to the most fundamental aspects of the social work practitioner as both a person and professional. This includes anti-oppressive

social work principles that engage the practitioner in the "building of relationships with others... to analyze oppressive conditions, to reclaim group identity and to change social and psychological patterns associated with oppression" (Mullaly, 2002, p. 172). This internal work raises the larger questions as to why war, state violence and partner violence continue at alarming rates, and what our roles may be in this paradigm. If we are to be truly helpful, social workers must persevere in efforts to equip themselves with effective support and intervention strategies to assist the numerous survivors, while pursuing the struggle to eradicate violence and promote social justice.

More information and resources can be found through local women's and immigrant women's centres, centre for survivors of torture, women's shelter networks and immigrant/refugee associations. Helpful resources include: The Alliance to End Violence at <http://www.endviolence.ca/home> and The Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture at <http://www.ccvv.org>.

References

- Amnesty International. (2004). *Lives Blown Apart. Crimes Against Women in Times of Conflict*. Oxford, U.K.: Alden Press.
- Ampofo, A., Beoku-Betts, J., Njambi, W., & Osirim, M. (2004). Women's and gender studies in English-speaking Sub-Saharan Africa: A review of research in the social sciences. *Gender & Society, 18*, 685-714.
- Canada. Statistics Canada, The Juristat. Results from the biennial Transition Home Survey, "Canada's Shelters for Abused Women, 2003/04."
- Caprioli, M. (2006). Primed for Violence: The role of gender inequality in predicating internal conflict. *International Studies Quarterly, 49*, 161-178.
- Drachman, D. (1992). A stage of migration framework for service to immigrant populations, *Social Work, 37*(1), 68-72.
- Enloe, C. (2000). *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Human Rights Watch. (2004). *Women's rights*. Human Rights Watch. Retrieved April 27, 2006 from <http://hrw.org/women/>

Hynes, H.P. (2004, November). On the battlefield of women's bodies: An overview of the harm of war to women. *Source: Women's Studies International Forum*, 27(5/6), 431–445.

International Committee for the Red Cross. (2005). *Women and war*. International Committee for the Red Cross. Retrieved April 23, 2006 from <http://www.icrc.org/eng/women>

Jacobson, R., Jacobs, S., & Marchbank, J. (2000). Introduction: *States of conflict*. In S. Jacobs, R. Jacobson, & J. Marchbank (Eds.), *States of Conflict* (pp. 1–19). New York: Zed Books.

Lorentzen, L.A., & Turpin, J. (1998). *The Women & War Reader*. New York and London: New York University Press.

Mullaly, B. (2002). *Challenging Oppression. A Critical Social Work Approach* (p. 172). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Pine, B., & Drachman, D. (2005). Effective child welfare practice with immigrant and refugee children and their families. *Child Welfare*, 84(5), 537–562.

Roy, G., & Montgomery, C. (2003). Practice with immigrants in Quebec. In A. Al-Krenawi & J. Graham (Eds.) *Multicultural Social Work in Canada: Working with Diverse Ethno-racial Communities* (pp. 122–147). Don Mills: Oxford University Press.

Smith, E. (2004). *Nowhere to turn? Responding to partner violence against immigrant and visible minority women*. Ottawa: Canadian Council on Social Development.

Tabassum Naved, R. & Åke Persson, L. (2005). Factors associated with spousal physical violence against Women in Bangladesh. *Studies in Family Planning*, 36, 289.

Turpin, J. (1998). Many faces. Women confronting war. In L. A. Lorentzen & J. Turpin (Eds.), *The Women & War Reader* (pp. 3–18). New York: New York University Press.

United Nations. Commission on the Status of Women. (2000). *Bringing International Human Rights Law Home*. United Nations.

Watts, C. & Zimmerman, C. (2002). Violence against women: global scope and magnitude. *The Lancet*, 359, 1232–1237.

Biographical notes

Liza Lorenzetti (MSW) is community social worker with the City of Calgary and an instructor in the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Calgary. Liza has worked with immigrant and refugee women and their families for over 20 years.

David Este is a professor in the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Calgary. During the past 15 years he has been involved in several research studies exploring the settlement and adaptation of immigrants and refugees to Canadian society.

Young Carers in Immigrant Families

An Ignored Population

Grant Charles • Tim Stainton • Sheila Marshall

Abstract

Much of the research currently being conducted with immigrant youth focuses on their relationship with the external world in their new country. What little work has been done on the interactions between young people and their families tends to examine the “cultural clash” between parents and children. Even less has been written about the added caring responsibilities that fall on some immigrant youth as they provide a level of care beyond that which would normally be expected of them in their families. In both immigrant and non-immigrant populations, young carers are an under-examined phenomenon. A result of this lack of understanding is that these young people are often invisible within communities. This means that they often lack the support and resources that would help them cope with the difficult responsibilities they must take on to contribute to the well-being of their families. This article reports the findings of a qualitative retrospective study that explored the experiences of young carers within immigrant families.

Keywords: Young carers • immigrant youth • immigrant families

Much of the research that has been conducted on immigrant youth focuses on their relationships with the world outside their families (Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009; Yeh, Kim, Pituc & Atkins, 2008). Such work tends to examine the adaptive struggles of the youth (Ma, 2002), or the interactions of these young people with various entities: the school system (Glick & Hohmann-Marriott, 2007), the criminal justice system (Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009), members of their cultural community (Tsai, 2006), or the broader dominant society (Ngo & Le, 2007). The relatively sparse literature on intrafamilial dynamics most often explores the intergenerational and intercultural conflict between young people and their parents, as family members attempt to find their place in the “two worlds” of their lives (Ngo, 2008; Ngo & Le, 2007; Yeh, Okubo, Ma, Shea, Ou & Pituc, 2008).

There are very few studies on the caregiving responsibilities that fall upon immigrant youth as their families struggle with the stresses of adjusting to a new country. What is written tends to address caregiving as a filial duty (Yeh et al., 2008). However, the group of immigrant youth who appear to be almost universally ignored are the young people who must take on extraordinary caregiving roles within their families. It should not be surprising that these young people are overlooked, as caregiving youth tend to be invisible, even in the nonimmigrant population (Charles, Stainton & Marshall, 2008, 2009).

Young carers are often defined as being someone “under the age of 18 years who is the primary caregiver in the family due to parental illness, disability, or addiction” (Aldridge & Becker, 1993). We have added to this definition the phrase “beyond what

would be culturally expected,” to reflect the variations in expectations for contributions to family well-being across different cultures (Charles, Stainton & Marshall, 2009). We define the contributions of young carers as beyond what would normally be expected within their cultures; these contributions offer both costs and benefits to the caregivers. Their circumstances and motivations may vary widely, depending upon their situations. This article reports on a qualitative study conducted with young participants from immigrant families who had significant caregiving responsibilities.

Of the 50 participants, 20 self-identified as coming from immigrant families; these respondents form the basis of this sub-study on the experiences of young people with caregiving roles. Three of the participants were male, and 17 were female.

All participants gave informed consent. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. From this material, researchers were able to identify certain themes that emerged from a “constant comparison” method of analysis.

Of the 50 participants, 20 self-identified as coming from immigrant families; these respondents form the basis of this sub-study on the experiences of young people with caregiving roles. Three of the participants were male and 17 were female. The participants varied widely in terms of current occupation and socioeconomic status. Their families had originally come to Canada from countries as diverse as China, Germany, Holland, Hungary, India, Lebanon, the Philippines, Portugal, Russia, Serbia, Tanzania, and Vietnam.

There are a number of limitations associated with this method of research. Retrospective studies are by their very nature influenced by the current interpretation that participants place upon past events, thus potentially limiting their accuracy. As well, given the age range of the participants, it is also safe to say that the social, cultural and economic variables that influenced their experiences may have changed over time. The fact that participants self-selected for the study also decreases the likelihood that results can be widely generalized. However, we found that participants had much in common, despite their many differences in gender, ethnicity, age, and circumstances.

Methodology

Through the Young Carers of British Columbia Study, we conducted 50 interviews with adults between the ages of 18 and 57 who were young carers at one point in their lives. Approval for the study was granted by the Behavioural Research Ethics Board of the University of British Columbia. The participants were recruited through posters distributed in a broad range of locations in a city in British Columbia. Using semi-structured interviews, each of the individuals interviewed was asked to retrospectively report on their experiences as young carers, and how they thought this may have influenced their subsequent lives.

Results

A number of broad themes emerged during our analysis, along with a number of sub-themes. The first theme, reported under the title “Reasons for Caring,” captures issues relating to economics, mental illness, physical illness, alcoholism, and accidents—all identified by participants as instigators for their caring roles. In a number of cases there were multiple reasons why the young people had to take on caring responsibilities.

The second theme, “Tasks of Caring,” examines the often multiple caregiving

responsibilities the young people had to take on, including parenting, translation, physical care, and emotional support.

A third theme, titled “Costs of Caring,” looks at the human costs associated with taking on the caregiving role. These include feelings of difference, being robbed of childhood, social isolation, and delay in social development. Other costs, both immediate and long-term, include feelings of anger, distrust, and difficulties with subsequent relationships.

Lastly, we report a fourth theme: “Motivations for Caring.” These include lack of choice, a sense of duty, potential future self-interest, and the lack of other options.

Reasons for caring

Participants reported a range of reasons why they became young carers, none of which had to do with cultural expectations. Children in many cultures are expected to contribute to the well-being and functioning of their families by helping around the house, or helping in other ways. As a result, participants were subject to varied expectations in terms of what they would have been expected to contribute in normal situations. However, their family circumstances dictated that they had to contribute much more than would normally have been expected. This fact is what distinguished them from other young people from similar cultural backgrounds. Young carers take on that role because of the exceptional circumstances of their families, which may be influenced by a number of factors. In some cases, it had to do with immigration issues; in other situations, it had to do with life circumstances that had nothing to do with being an immigrant. In other cases, the cause of the family difficulties existed prior to their move to Canada, and was reportedly made worse by the stress of immigrating.

Economic reasons

A common reason why a number of participants became young carers was related to the economic circumstances of the family. The

parents had to work long hours to support their families, which meant that someone else had to take on a large part of their responsibilities within the family. As one participant noted:

[My father] ended up going up north working in the mines... that’s a way he could make money, by being out of town. That meant I was the one at home.

“The human costs associated with taking on the caregiving role [include] feelings of difference, being robbed of childhood, social isolation, and delay in social development.”



In another case the parents were not physically absent, but they were rarely at home because they worked more than one job:

[My dad] had a night-shift job and he had a day job, and we would see him for perhaps two hours in the evening before he would leave at eight o’clock....Both my parents worked.

Mental illness

In other families, participants took on caring responsibilities because one or more of the parents was incapacitated due to mental health issues, some of which were triggered by stresses related to immigration. One participant stated that:

[My mother was] really depressed...being stuck in a unhappy marriage and not feeling at home in Canada....She was suicidal for quite a while as well.

Alcoholism

The same participant felt that the family had struggled before they immigrated, and then things got worse after they came to this country:

[The alcoholism] would have been there regardless. I think it was compounded by the immigration, but my dad’s drinking was present before immigrating. [My parents] had very severe experiences [before we immigrated].

Accident

In other situations, young people became carers by accident. As one participant said:

Both my parents were in a very severe car accident....My mum had a really bad head injury, and over a period of time, you could see that her memory wasn’t as good as before.

Parents had to work long hours to support their families, which meant that someone else had to take on a large part of their responsibilities within the family.

Physical illness

A number of participants became young carers because someone had to take care of a parent who was ill:

When I was nine years old [my dad] developed some problems. He had diabetes and some [bone disease]....He had a lot of problems getting around. My mother was working and my siblings were mostly all out of the house most of the time [so I had to take care of him].

Multiple reasons

In many families there were multiple stressors. The following participant became a young carer because of the illness of a grandparent. The responsibilities fell on him because both of his parents were working:

My grandmother had a lot of illnesses. She had three cancers, and because my parents were heavily involved in work, I constantly had to prepare her for her surgeries, and go with her for her surgeries, and translate, and take care of her afterwards.

Tasks of caring

The circumstances of the family dictated the roles and responsibilities of participants. In some situations, the young carers functioned fully as a parent, while in other situations they took on home care roles.

Parenting

One participant became almost a parent to her younger sister, and saw herself as a surrogate mother to her sibling:

My dad would leave for work early [and Mom was ill]... so I’d get [my sister] up and get her ready for school, get her to school, and then get to school myself....After school, care and then [get]...groceries, dinner and all that stuff, I took her to Brownies, violin lessons. I was the one that her counselors from school would call, when things weren’t going well with her.

Translating

In other cases, participants were initially put into their roles because of their language skills, but over time they also took on at least a partial parenting role:

I was always the translator for parent-teacher interviews, if there was anything going on with my brother. He’s not very good in school, and so I had to be the one [to] talk to his counselor, talk to his teachers, ask them why he’s failing, what he can do to improve.

Physical care

In some situations, participants provided physical care to ailing family members. This participant was the primary care giver for a seriously ill grandparent:

[I'd] have to sponge her, wash her [and] have to spoon-feed her sometimes. She couldn't get out of bed [to go to the bathroom, and] sometimes she dirtied herself, and [I'd] have to clean it up.

Emotional Support

Sometimes the young person become a peer to their parent, responsible for providing comfort:

[I spent time] just hanging out and being present with him....I would sit with him, and just be with him.

Costs of caring

All participants identified a price they paid for being a young carer, a cost that set them apart from their peers. Their family circumstances demanded that they give significantly more to ensure the functioning of their families than would be expected in normal situations.

Feeling different

One of the most common feelings identified by participants was the sense that they were different from their peers. The time constraints of being a young carer meant that this participant was often unable to make arrangements to be with friends:

I felt a lot of burden. I was probably a bit jealous [of my friends] because I couldn't just say, "Yeah, sure, I'll see you in half an hour." It was always like "Well, I can meet you in a couple of hours" [because I had to take care of my Mom]. I felt different, felt a bit out of place.

Robbed of a childhood

This sense of difference was often quite significant: many participants felt they had experienced a major loss in their lives because of their caregiving responsibilities. As this participant noted:

I think I was more mature than most people my age, [but] on some level I feel like I've been robbed of a childhood.

"[I'd] have to sponge her, wash her [and] have to spoon-feed her sometimes. She couldn't get out of bed [to go to the bathroom, and] sometimes she dirtied herself, and [I'd] have to clean it up."

Socially isolated

The time demands of the caring role meant that many participants did not have the opportunities most young people have to spend time with friends. In a period of their lives when most young people build strong relationships with peers, many participants felt isolated:

I think caregiving...disconnected me from my peers.

Socially delayed

One participant believes that, as an adult, she has trouble connecting with people her own age because she was unable to spend much time with peers when she was an adolescent:

I feel delayed relative to my age group now, whereas as a teen I felt ahead.

Guilt and anger

One participant grew angry over the demands placed upon her, which in turn created a sense of guilt:

There was guilt mixed with anger, and so I became angrier.

Helpless and burdened

Some participants had mixed feelings about their caregiving role:

I felt very helpless. I felt good that it was kind of like an adult topic, and that she would actually sit me down and trust me enough to say what she wanted to say. But at the same time I felt very burdened.

Isolated from family

Another participant noted that even though she spent a lot of time with her family due to her caregiving responsibilities, she did not really feel close to her parents:

I was growing up in my head....It was always like, I *know* these are my parents, but I don't particularly *feel* like they're my parents.

Role reversal

Several participants noted their discomfort in having to take on adult roles within their families. As this participant said, it was the reverse of what she thought should have happened:

Coming from an Asian background, it was a little bit weird. As a child, I was supposed to [have] an inferior status, and the adults were supposed to do the caring. So at times I was a little bit uncomfortable.

Distorted relationships

Such reversals of roles, where children take on parenting roles, appear to have long-term consequences for some people. As one participant noted, she believes her early responsibilities had a strong influence on her relationships in adulthood:

I was a rescue rabbit. I was in the role of rescuing people. I had to fix people up, because that's the only way I felt good. I didn't feel worthy of love in any other way.

Because some participants did not have the opportunity to develop age-appropriate relationships when they were younger, this led to relationship difficulties as adults:

I got myself into some pretty bad relationships. [I just wanted to] have a connection, to have someone that wanted to spend time with me. I dated older guys because they

seemed more mature at the time. [I] got into some pretty abusive relationships.

Distrust

Some relationship issues appear to be the result of the unexpected caregiving roles that participants took on when they were younger. Their childhood did not go as they expected, and so maybe things would not work out as they should in adulthood. As one person noted:

I have this ongoing undercurrent of distrust that if something was to happen to me, an illness or something, I don't fully trust [I'll] be taken care of.

Positive aspects of caring

We have examined the many costs associated with being a young carer. However, a number of participants were also able to identify some positive aspects to their caregiving roles. Many believe that the people they are today can be attributed to the responsibilities they took on as young people.

Stronger

For some participants, their most significant belief is that their caregiving experiences made them stronger people. This participant noted:

It made me stronger emotionally, because I'm able to go through the fact that I might lose a person. [I know] I have to be strong for that person.

Sense of pride

Many participants also felt proud of their roles within the family, and the contributions they had made. As one stated:

[My parents] were proud of me....I guess it did mature me in that respect. It was also easier for them because my mum would not be able to translate information [on her own].

Change of perspective

Another participant realized that her role as a young carer made her appreciate the important things in life:

I think it's a positive experience, in a way. It kind of guided my life and changed my perspective on things. It certainly taught me to appreciate certain things, like relationships and family.

Maturity

Another said the most important characteristic she developed as a young carer was maturity:

I think it made me a lot more mature, I generally relate much better to older people.

Regardless of their individual cultures, someone had to step forward to help the family through stressful circumstances and keep it together.

Independence

Another common outcome mentioned by participants was the sense that their roles helped them become self-sufficient. One person mentioned that:

I guess I kind of feel like I [could] always [take] care of myself.

Motivations for caring

While the circumstances in which participants became young carers varied, the reasons why they took on the roles were similar: someone had to. They did it because, regardless of their individual cultures, someone had to step forward to help keep the family together through stressful circumstances.

No choice

A number of participants talked about not having any choice about becoming a young carer. As this participant noted:

I just had to do it, like it was unquestionable. If I wasn't going to do it, who would?

Modelling family duties

One participant mentioned what he saw as partially selfish reasons for doing what he did:

I think if I do this for my [grandmother] now, then some day when I get old and in the same circumstances, hopefully I'll get the same support from my grandchildren.

Duty

One participant made a distinction between stepping forward as a personal responsibility, as opposed to a cultural expectation:

At the time I didn't really identify [it] as a Chinese custom, like the filial piety concept. At the time I didn't have that notion of filial piety ingrained in me. It was just, if I don't do it, who else will?

No one else

One participant said she was the only person in her family who was well enough to take on the caregiving role:

It was a default thing; there was no one else.

No other support

A common theme among young carers was the lack of support available to them. As one participant stated:

We needed someone else to step in, someone else to help us. My dad used to say, "You shouldn't be doing all this." Neighbours should have helped more, or family friends [should have visited or] called. No one ever called. Help would have been really nice

The impact of this lack of support on participants was made worse by the isolation they experienced as immigrants:

There's a lack of family support, because we moved away from them when we immigrated. We're really disconnected from them now.

Conclusion

As mentioned, a number of themes emerged during our analysis of the data, such as the reasons why young people take on caregiving roles in immigrant families. However, other than helping as translators, these reasons do not appear to be different that from their non-immigrant peers. In general, young people become caregivers due to parental illness, disability, or addiction (Aldridge and Becker, 1993). In both immigrant and non-immigrant populations, they provide some combination of physical and emotional support for their families. Their motivations for becoming caregivers also appear to be similar in both populations: out of a sense of duty, or because there was no one else to do the work. The range of positive and negative consequences also appear to be the same for each group. For example, many young carers talk about feeling different than their peers, being robbed of a childhood, and experiencing social isolation (Charles, Stainton & Marshall, 2008, 2009). Generally, it appears that the immigrant participants in this study have a similar profile to non-immigrant young carers in all the areas explored.

Many young carers talk about feeling different than their peers, being robbed of a childhood, and experiencing social isolation.

However, this is not to say that the experiences of immigrant youth in caregiving roles are identical to those of their non-immigrant peers. Immigrant youth, whether or not they are caregivers, can face adjustment difficulties that are often “exacerbated by

racism, conflicting cultural values, educational gaps, language difficulties, and culture shock,” as well as other issues (Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009, p. 410). These must be taken into account when developing strategies to meet the needs of immigrant young carers. Generally, the similarities mean that it may be possible to develop a universal response to the needs of young carers—one that is flexible enough to take into account the unique cultural circumstances of young immigrant carers.

It is important to note that how we respond to young carers is to some degree linked to how we conceptualize the issue (Charles, Stainton & Marshall, 2009). On the one hand, if we see young caring in a purely pathological sense—that is, viewing young people as trapped in inappropriate or even abusive situations—then we might be inclined to a child-protection or psycho-therapeutic response. If, however, we see young carers simply as young people in a not uncommon role, though one that may potentially leave them vulnerable if unacknowledged or unsupported, then we are more likely to take an approach that focuses on support, awareness, and recognition. The dominant response elsewhere in the world (particularly in the United Kingdom, which has taken the lead in this area) has followed the latter approach, and has evolved a multi-layered approach to policy and practice. Our research, also, tends to favour the latter conceptualization. Hence it is instructive to look at the UK responses, and assess how they might be applied in Canada.

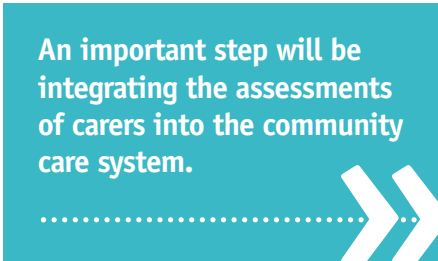
As mentioned, support and policy for young carers is a much higher priority in the United Kingdom than in North America. Since 1995 there have been three important pieces of UK legislation: the *Carers (Recognition and Services) Act 1995*, the *Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000*, and the *Carers (Equal Opportunities) Act 2004*. These provide a range of supports and services for carers—notably, the right to an assessment of their ability to continue to provide care, at the same time the

person receiving care is being assessed for services. The Local Authority must take this assessment into account when determining what, if any, services the individual receives. In the case of young carers under 16 years of age, they can request a Carers Assessment from the Local Authority Social Services as mentioned above, when the person receiving care is being assessed. If they are over 16, they can request an assessment at any time, and social services are required to provide it. (The exception to this rule is Scotland, where any young carer can request an assessment at any time under the provisions of the 2002 *Community Care and Health Act*). A young carer's assessment should look at the impact of caring on each individual's current life, and on their future development. The importance of these provisions is that they force widespread recognition of young carers and their role—not only in relation to the care plan, but also for the young person.

The earliest and still the most common response to young carers in the United Kingdom is the establishment of local young carers projects. These have expanded from 110 in 1999 to some 350 in 2008 (HM Government, 2008). The nature of these programs ranges from informal social groups to formal counseling and support—support that may be for the whole family, or specifically for young carers, especially those who care for family members dealing with addiction or mental-health issues. In some cases, respite breaks for young carers are also provided. There are also a number of other national supports and services, ranging from Young Carers festivals, to online peer-to-peer or youth counselling, to national help lines where young carers can receive confidential information or advice.

We do not have equivalent policies and programs in Canada, so there is a great deal of opportunity for social workers to make a major contribution to the task of meeting the needs of young carers. Obviously the prerequisite for developing policies and programs

An important step will be integrating the assessments of carers into the community care system.



is first the recognition that young carers exist, and second the creation of active measures to identify them and connect with them. This goal will require further research into the characteristics and needs of these young people. It will also necessitate the provision of professional education opportunities to increase awareness of the existence and needs of young carers. This training should be broad-based, since these young people are likely to come into contact with a number of service systems, depending upon the circumstances of their families. For example, it is not unusual for social workers in fields such as settlement and education services, child welfare, mental health, and health care, to come into regular contact with young carers—without the social workers even being aware of the roles the young people are undertaking. In addition to instituting training, current assessment mechanisms within service delivery systems should be adapted to help identify these young people.

An important step will be integrating the assessments of carers into the community care system. We also need to integrate the concept of issues regarding young carers into the broader realm of policy and services. School and health services are key areas to make aware of the existence of young carers and their needs: this will both help to identify young carers in need of support, and also provide an avenue to offer them support and advice. This is particularly critical in schools, where the drain of caregiving roles may seriously affect young people's academic performance. Failure to recognize these problems can have

serious ramifications for the young caregivers' intellectual and emotional development, and consequently their self-esteem and social development.

Finally, we need to develop appropriate services and supports for young people that are specific to their needs. While these can be developed in concert with existing agencies and organizations, to most effectively address the needs of young carers it is imperative to also target the family member receiving care. Otherwise, there is the risk that the young carer may be placed in the position of effectively providing an alternative to conventional support systems. While many young carers are not unhappy with their role when it is reasonable and limited in scope, the lack of suitable support services may in fact create two victims: the family member requiring assistance, and the young person forced into a role they neither want, nor should have to fill.

References

Aldridge, J., & Becker, S. (1993). *Children who Care: Inside the World of Young Carers*. Loughborough: Loughborough University.

Charles, G., Stainton, T., & Marshall, S. (2009). Young carers: Mature before their time. *Reclaiming Children and Youth*, 18(2), 37–41.

———. (2008). Young carers in Canada: An invisible population. *Relational Child and Youth Care Practice*, 21(4), 5–12.

Glick, J.E., & Hohmann-Marriott, B. (2007). Academic performance of young children in immigrant families: The significance of race, ethnicity, and national origins. *International Migration Review*, 41(2), 371–402.

HM Government. (2008). *Carers at the heart of 21st-century families and communities*. London: Department of Health.

Ma, X. (2002). The first ten years in Canada: A multi-level assessment of behavioural and emotional problems of immigrant children. *Canadian Public Policy*, XXVIII(3), 395–418.

Ngo, H.M., & Le, T. (2007). Stressful life events, culture, and violence. *Journal of Immigrant Health*, 9, 75–84.

Ngo, B. (2008). Beyond “culture clash” understandings of immigrant experiences. *Theory into Practice*, 47, 4–11.

Rossiter, M.J., & Rossiter, K.R. (2009). Diamonds in the rough: Bridging gaps in supports for at-risk immigrant and refugee youth. *International Migration and Integration*, 10, 409–429.

Tsai, J.H. (2006). Xenophobia, ethnic community, and immigrant youths' friendship network formation. *Adolescence*, 41(162), 285–298.

Yeh, C.J., Kim, A.B., Pituc, S.T., & Atkins, M. (2008). Poverty, loss, and resilience: The story of Chinese immigrant youth. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 55(1), 34–48.

Yeh, C. J., Okubo, Y., Ma, P.W., Shea, M., Ou, Pituc, S. T. (2008). Chinese immigrant high school students' cultural interactions, acculturation, family obligations, language use, and social support. *Adolescence*, 43(1720), 775–790.

Biographical notes

Drs. Grant Charles, Tim Stainton and Sheila Marshall are all affiliated with the School of Social Work at the University of British Columbia (Vancouver). The Young Carers of British Columbia Study was funded by grants from SSHRC and the Hampton Fund (UBC).

“Young, But Older Than 20”

Better Practices in Enhancing Access to Services for Newcomer Youth in Toronto

Roxana Salehi

Abstract

Newcomer adolescents comprise a significant portion of Toronto populations, yet there is a dearth of research about their access to health or other social services. This article focuses on three issues that influence access to those services: language and interpretation, confidentiality, and legal status. The data are drawn from several sources: from the relevant literature, from the author’s personal experience working with newcomer youth, and from the results of a community-based project, the Toronto Teen Survey. These findings have important implications for public-health planning and policy, social work, settlement services, and youth-serving organizations.

Keywords: Access to services • immigrant and refugee youth • multicultural social work

Adolescence is a crucial transition period between childhood and adulthood, and influences the entire adult life trajectory. Health and social services play an important role in providing adolescents with the support they need to sustain health, prevent disease, and progress into adulthood. In the process of searching for identity and independence, adolescents communicate and behave very differently from either adults or children; yet community services are generally geared toward either one of those groups. There is no agreed-upon set of standards to make services adolescent-friendly, and providers are often not adequately trained in adolescent issues.

Some guidelines are emerging from the field of public health about how to make health services more accessible to some groups, such as street-involved or HIV-infected youth (Australia, 2003; Bell, et al., 2003; Betteridge, 2006; Brindis, Loo, Adler, Bolan & Wasserheit, 2005; McIntyre, 2002; Schneiderman, Brooks, Facher & Amis, 2007). Still, there is little research on the access

problems of young immigrants, refugees, or “non-status” youth who have lived in Canada for less than three years (AIDS Committee of Toronto, 2006; Hyman, 2001, 2007; Khanlou & Crawford, 2006; Kobayashi, Moore & Resenberg, 1998; Liban, 2007; Planned Parenthood of Toronto, 2005). This is troubling, especially as this demographic comprises 17% of Toronto’s population. This article attempts to reduce this gap by reflecting on the three key issues that most influence access to services: language and interpretation, confidentiality, and legal status. These findings have important implications for public health planning and policy, social work, settlement services, and youth-serving organizations.

It’s important to acknowledge that these newcomers are not a homogeneous group. There are many differences, such as family dynamics, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, or legal status, that influence adolescents’ access to services. For example, refugees, or those who are living in Canada illegally, will most likely not access services for fear of being reported to the

authorities. As well, the youth themselves do not necessarily identify with the definitions used by researchers, youth workers, and service providers—words like “newcomer” and “immigrant.” Young people may well conceptualize the immigration experience in many diverse ways (see <http://youth.more.settlement.org>, cited in Salehi, 2009).

Data sources and methods

Data for this article come from three main sources: the relevant literature, the author’s personal experience working with newcomer youth, and findings from a community-based project, the Toronto Teen Survey (TTS), with which the author was also involved. The aim here is not merely to summarize the results of that project, but to present a cross-section of the results that are most relevant to those who work with newcomer adolescents in various settings. Although the TTS project dealt specifically with the accessibility of sexual-health services for adolescents, this article will discuss what aspects of the results can be extended to other services. (Note that the words youth and adolescents are used interchangeably here.)

Toronto Teen Survey

This community-based research project gathered information on the assets, gaps and barriers that currently exist for youth aged 13-19 in gaining access to sexual-health education and services. The survey was the result of a partnership between a Youth Advisory Committee, Planned Parenthood Community Health Center, and several academic and policy partners. In the first phase (Dec. 2006–Aug. 2007), we obtained quantitative data from 1,200 Toronto youth, in order to find what factors help or hinder them from using the services. Samples were drawn from pre-existing youth groups, such as homework clubs and after-school drop-in programs. In addition, visits were made to places where

marginalized young people tend to congregate, such as shelters, group homes, and support programs for sexually diverse youth; this was part of a strategy for contacting “hard-to-reach” youth. Two survey sessions were conducted, with help from an interpreter.

In the next phase (Oct. 2008–Aug. 2009), we conducted a series of qualitative focus groups with youth and their service providers, in order to share the survey results and to ask further questions to probe and contextualize significant quantitative findings. Five such groups were conducted with newcomer-serving organizations across the city, and four with newcomer youth themselves. One group was conducted with the help of an interpreter. All groups were recorded, and the discussions transcribed.

Visits were made to places where marginalized young people tend to congregate, such as shelters, group homes, and support programs for sexually diverse youth; this was part of a strategy for contacting “hard-to-reach” youth.



Language and interpretation

Adolescents who are not fluent in either English or French experience heightened barriers to accessing services. At times, they feel ashamed of their accents (Liban, 2007; Scott, 2000), or do not know what to say, or how to express themselves in an appropriate way. They may feel frustration because of this, and sense a loss of identity (Espín, 1997). That said, some newcomers have useful strategies and positive

attitudes to cope with language difficulties. As one female participant said in a focus group:

Some people laugh at my English, but my [ESL] teacher respects me: other people only speak one language, and I speak three: Cantonese, Mandarin, and my English is getting better.

Often, adolescents must not only navigate the system for their own needs, but also for their families. Since children and adolescents may learn the language faster than their parents, they are frequently forced into the role of family interpreter. They end up helping their parents to communicate with the landlord, the immigration office, the doctor, etc. (Roberge, 2003). This situation is most common among refugee families (Liban, 2007; Orellana, Dorner & Pulido, 2003). Such role reversal can cause a lot of stress, as young people must navigate a complex system of fragmented services. The need for linguistic accessibility for youth is evident from this discussion.

Defining linguistic accessibility

There has been some advocacy around the provision of linguistically accessible services for youth (AIDS Committee of Toronto, 2006; Planned Parenthood of Toronto, 2005). What that means in practical terms, however, is not clear. In our survey, when youth were asked to pick the top three things they want in a sexual health clinic, newcomer youth were the only group who picked the option “[I want to] feel comfortable asking questions.” This shows that creating accessible services goes far beyond just having someone on staff who can translate the dialogue between adolescents and staff. Youth also want to have someone that they feel comfortable talking to, despite their language difficulties. Focus group discussions confirmed this:

Facilitator: Would it be helpful if the doctor spoke your language?

Participant [shrugging]: I would want a doctor who understands how I feel.

When youth were asked to pick the top three things they want in a sexual health clinic, newcomer youth were the only group who picked the option “[I want to] feel comfortable asking questions.”

Working with interpreters

The situation of working with interpreters offers a few noteworthy points. If there is a time constraint, a professionally trained interpreter (as opposed to a volunteer) is the ideal choice, since they save a great deal of time. Also important is advising the interpreter of the topic in advance: the explicit vocabulary of sexual health is not one that every interpreter feels comfortable with. Age is also an issue, in that we found it was easier for young people to talk to a younger interpreter. The age similarity reduced the power imbalance between the two, and made the process less intimidating. As one girl observed:

I think age is another factor that people really consider. You probably feel more comfortable going to people who are your age, and they can understand you better.

It was notable that adolescents were unanimous in wanting to talk to someone who was “just a little bit older” (male participant), “a young person, but not too young” (female participant), or “young, but older than 20” (male participant). It seemed they wanted someone young enough for them to relate to, while the “slightly older” reassured them that the information would be correct. Service providers should also consider the fact, however, that even the best interpreter is still an extra body in the room, and may change the

dynamic of interaction. Some youth never felt comfortable if an interpreter was present. One concern may be that the interpreter would not respect the young person’s right to privacy. In fact, this point applies to all health or social-services staff, and is discussed next.

Adolescents were unanimous in wanting to talk to someone who was “just a little bit older,” “a young person, but not too young,” or “young, but older than 20.”

has been shown to make young people less likely to disclose personal information, substance use (Committee on Adolescent Health Care Services and Models of Care for Treatment, 2008), suicidal thoughts, or adherence to drug regimens (Duncan, 2009). While desire for confidential services is not unique to newcomer youth, certain aspects of their lives make the issue more important to them.

Confidentiality and parents

The parents of newcomer youth often hold very different values from their more rapidly acculturating children. Old-school versus new-school notions of what is acceptable and what is not, particularly in sexual matters, can cause intergenerational conflicts and stress for both parents and youth (Anisef, 2005; Khanlou & Crawford, 2006). Accordingly, adolescents may be particularly worried about confidentiality in regard to issues that they know are unacceptable to their parents. As for the parents, they may be unused to information about their children being withheld from them by health professionals. This scenario can lead to many tensions between parents, service providers, and youth. As one male family physician observed of newcomer families:

I don’t think I’ve yet succeeded in taking away from youth the fear that I would conspire with their parents against them, or eliminated from the parents the expectation that they have a right to get information about [their children]. There’s often a negotiation that has to be done, with clarification here and confidentiality there. Fear is a big issue that impedes youth who come to me as the family doctor.

There is also evidence, limited but encouraging, that in the United States, parents who receive training about the importance of confidential care for adolescents generally respond positively (Huchinson & Stafford (2005), cited in Committee on Adolescent Health Care Services 2008).

Confidentiality

All health professionals are governed by many confidentiality policies. Anyone who collects health information, regardless of where they work, must follow the guidelines provided by the *Personal Health Information Protection Act* (Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, 2004). Other professions, such as social work, have their own ethical and professional guidelines (Canadian Association of Social Workers, 2005). The only factor that overrides confidentiality rules is the “duty to report”: anyone who suspects child abuse must report it to an aid society. Health professionals can even be fined for not doing so (Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies).

A large body of literature confirms adolescents’ tremendous desire for confidentiality, and their refusal to access services if they perceive them as non-confidential (Bennett, Cronholm, Neill & Chism, 2004; McKee, O’Sullivan & Weber, 2006; Thomas, Murray & Rogstad, 2006). Perceived lack of confidentiality

Confidentiality dilemmas, policies and procedures

The system for ensuring confidentiality of youth information may be better in Canada than in many countries, but it is far from perfect. Despite the importance of discretion in providing services to youth, there is evidence of some practitioners breaching confidentiality. During a recent (2008) professional development conference for social service agencies (the Ontario Coalition of Agencies Serving Immigrants, or OCASI), some youth/settlement workers raised concerns about this subject. One person reported of another agent that she just picked up the phone and called the mom to say, “Oh, your daughter is pregnant.”

There are a range of potential motives for social workers to breach youth confidentiality. Gallagher (cited in Duncan et al., 2009) describes several: wanting to relieve your own anxiety about the youth’s well-being, desire to comply with child protection laws, wanting to avoid being held responsible if anything goes wrong, feeling


that you would want to know if you were the parent, or believing that you can genuinely help the youth by passing on information. It is a difficult task to balance these competing interests, and to decide whether to offer young people a conditional or an unconditional promise of confidentiality. This area, at least as it concerns the field of social research, is much debated. One suggestion (by Duncan, 2009) was to be open about your terms with the youth (and the parents, if appropriate) from the outset.

In an organizational setting, this also requires that all workers be aware of the confidentiality policies in place to deal with clients. During the 2009 OCASI conference, some settlement workers raised concerns about being uncertain of the confidentiality policies of their respective agencies. Training staff in this area would be a step at the right direction; and it is also important to educate adolescents about their rights, and to make them aware of the mechanisms in place to ensure accountability.

Table 1
Enhancing access to services for newcomer youth

Issue	What can be done
Youth as language brokers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize that youth may have to act as interpreters for their families • Provide extra support for youth
Youth not sure how to make themselves understood in an appropriate way	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make youth feel comfortable asking questions • Use youth-friendly interpreters, preferably younger ones
Youth concerned about confidentiality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train staff and interpreters to respect privacy • Educate youth about their rights, and about procedures for making complaints if their rights are not respected • Be upfront with youth and/or their parents about how the organization handles confidentiality
Youth may have no legal status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt a “Don’t ask, don’t tell” policy • In advertising, be explicit that services are offered to non-status youth

The problem is that we have to ask about immigration status because we have “non-status” OHIP pots of money. This admission requirement threatens [young people] and compromises confidentiality. How do we get around that, and ask them the question without triggering alarm bells?



Legal issues

A search of the literature revealed that few studies have investigated the health of non-status immigrant youth (Salehi, 2009). It is outside the scope of this article to examine how youth might end up with precarious legal status (for a discussion, see OCASI, 2010). One example is unaccompanied minors: if an immigrant youth under 18 arrives in Canada alone, or with an adult not deemed an appropriate guardian, he or she is taken into the custody of the Children’s Aid Society. While in this care, he or she is able to access educational and health services. Unfortunately, it often happens that such adolescents reach the age of 18, and graduate out of the child welfare system, without first obtaining legal status in Canada. When that happens, they lose their former privileges of access: their lack of status henceforth means anxiety and uncertainty, along with lack of access to public, private, and community services (Hare, 2007, and Montgomery, 2002, cited in Salehi, 2009).

Theoretically, youth with no status and/ or legal documents should be able to access

some services because of the “Don’t ask, don’t tell” policy adopted by many community organizations. However, as one service provider described the situation:

The problem is that we have to ask about immigration status because we have “non-status” OHIP pots of money. This admission requirement threatens [young people] and compromises confidentiality. How do we get around that, and ask them the question without triggering alarm bells?

Being asked about their legal status can be quite intimidating for some, especially for young people who came to Canada because of wars or political instability in their homeland, or persecution for their religious affiliations or sexual orientation (Liban, 2007). These previous histories of oppression affect youth attitudes towards all government agencies and authority (Roberge, 2003). One adolescent responding to a survey wrote that fear of “being blackmailed” would stop them from going to a sexual health clinic. Given this context, it may be beneficial to advertise services as being open to non-status clients, and for staff to make explicit the reasons why they may ask about young clients’ immigration status.

Conclusion

Table 1 summarizes the discussion by highlighting some of the potential problems newcomer youth might have in accessing social and health services, and by providing some suggestions about what can be done to alleviate the problems. These suggestions are neither comprehensive nor a recipe, merely proposals that may be adapted in response to adolescents’ diverse life experiences and history.

For further reading: Delgado, Jones & Rohani, 2005; Graham & Al-Krenawi, 2003; Hieu Van Ngo, 2009; Anisef & Kilbride, 2003; Planned Parenthood of Toronto, 2008.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Dr. Sarah Flicker and Martin Mills, for their critical feedback on this manuscript, the youth who participated in the research, Planned Parenthood Toronto, the entire Toronto Teen Survey team, and the project funders: the Canadian Institute for Health Research, the Ontario HIV Treatment Network, the Wellesley Institute, and the Center for Urban Health Initiative. The author would also like to thank the Canadian Institute for Health Research for supporting this research through a CIHR doctoral fellowship.

References

- AIDS Committee of Toronto. (2006). *Youth Migration Project*. AIDS Committee of Toronto.
- Anisef, P. (2005). *Issues confronting newcomer youth in Canada: Alternative models for a national youth host program*.
- Anisef, P. & Kilbride, M. (Eds.). (2003). *Managing Two Worlds: The Experiences and Concerns of Immigrant Youth in Ontario*. Toronto: Canadian Scholar's Press.
- Anonymous. (2008). Ontario Coalition of Agencies Serving Immigrants Professional Development Conference. Orillia, Ontario.
- Australia, C.L. (2003). *Review of Innovative Health Services for Homeless Young People: Community Link Australia*.
- Bell, D., Botwinick, G., Dodds, S., Friedman, L.B., Johnson, R.L., Martinez, J., et al. (2003). The utilization of treatment and case management services by HIV-infected youth. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 33*(2), 31–38.
- Bennett, I., Cronholm, P., Neill, R., & Chism, L. (2004). Confidential reproductive care for adolescents. *American Family Physician, 69*(5), 1056–1058.
- Betteridge, G. (2006). Health services, including needle exchange, key issue for Correctional Investigator. *HIV/AIDS Policy & Law Review / Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, 11*(2-3), 27, 29.
- Brindis, C., Loo, V., Adler, N.E., Bolan, G., & Wasserheit, J. (2005). Service integration and teen friendliness in practice: A program assessment of sexual and reproductive health services for adolescents. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 37*, 155–162.
- Canadian Association of Social Workers. (2005). Code of Ethics. Available at www.casw-acts.ca/practice/codeofethics_e.pdf [English version].
- Committee on Adolescent Health Care Services and Models of Care for Treatment, P., & Healthy Development. (2008). *Adolescent health services: Missing opportunities*.
- Delgado, M., Jones, K., & Rohani, M. (2005). *Social Work Practices with Refugee and Immigrant Youth in the United States*. Boston: Person Education Inc.
- Duncan, R., Drew, S., Hodgson, J., Sawyer, S. (2009). Is my mum going to hear this? Methodological and ethical challenges in qualitative health research with young people. *Social Science & Medicine, 62*, 1691–1699.
- Espín, O.M. (1997). *Latina Realities: Essays on Healing, Migration, and Sexuality*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Graham, J.R., & Al-Krenawi, A. (2003). *Multicultural Social Work in Canada : Working with Diverse Ethno-racial Communities*. Don Mills (Ontario): Oxford University Press.
- Hieu, V.N. (2009). Patchwork, sidelining and marginalization: Services for immigrant youth. *Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies, 7*(1), 82–100.
- . (2001). *Immigration and Health, Policy Working Paper Series*. Ottawa, Ontario: Health Canada.
- Hyman, I. (2007). *Immigration and Health: Reviewing Evidence of Healthy Immigrant Effect in Canada*: Joint Center of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Settlement. Toronto.
- Khanlou, N., & Crawford, C. (2006). Post-migratory experiences of newcomer female youth: Self-esteem and identity development. *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health, 8*(1), 45–55.
- Kobayashi, A., Moore, E., & Resenberg, M. (1998). *Healthy Immigrant Children: A demographic and geographic analysis*. Canada: Human Resources Development Canada.
- Liban. (2007). *Settlement and Integration Services Organization (SISO)*. Paper presented at the Refugee Child Health Conference.
- McIntyre, P. (2002). *Adolescent Friendly Health Services: An Agenda for Change*. World Health Organization.

- McKee, M.D., O'Sullivan, L. F., & Weber, C. M. (2006). Perspectives on confidential care for adolescent girls. *Annals of Family Medicine*, 4, 519–526.
- Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. (2004). *Health Information Protection Act*, 2004. Retrieved May 10, 2010, from http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/providers/legislation/priv_legislation/priv_legislation.html
- Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies. (May 10, 2010). *Your duty to report*. Retrieved from www.oacas.org/childwelfare/duty.htm
- Ontario Coalition of Agencies Serving Immigrants. (2008). *OCASI Professional Development Conference*. Orillia, Ontario.
- . (2010). Status Campaign. Retrieved May 10, 2010, from www.ocasi.org/STATUS/documents.shtml
- Orellana, M.F., Dorner, L., & Pulido, L. (2003). Accessing Assets: Immigrant Youth's Work as Family Translators or "Para-Phrasers." *Social problems*, 50(4), 505–524.
- Planned Parenthood of Toronto. (2005). *Improving Access for Newcomer Youth to Sexual Health Resources and Services*. Toronto, Canada: Planned Parenthood of Toronto.
- Planned Parenthood Toronto. (2008). Self-esteem, Health, Appreciation, Respect, Project (SHARP): A toolkit for service providers.
- Roberge, M. (2003). *Generation 1.5 immigrant students: what special experiences, characteristics, and educational needs do they bring to our English classes?* Article presented at the Annual TESOL Convention.
- Salehi, R. (2009). Intersection of Health, Immigration, and Youth: A Systematic Literature Review. *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health*.
- Schneiderman, J.U., Brooks, D., Facher, B., & Amis, J. (2007). Improving health services for foster youth: Multidisciplinary and multistakeholder perspectives and recommendations. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 29(3), 313–328.
- Scott, J.L. (2000). *English Language and Communication: Issues for African and Caribbean Immigrant Youth in Toronto*: Coalition of Visible Minority Women (Ontario) Inc.
- Thomas, N., Murray, E., & Rogstad, K.E. (2006). Confidentiality is essential if young people are to access sexual health services. *International Journal of STD & AIDS*, 17(8), 525–529.

Biographical notes

Roxana Salehi is a doctoral candidate at York University in Toronto. She is a community-based researcher with a focus on the sexual health of adolescents, health systems research, immigrant and refugee health, and mixed-methods research.

Walk with Me

Mentoring Young Adult Immigrants

Grace Po-chee Ko

Abstract

Youngsters who came to Canada with their families do not integrate into the mainstream society as naturally as they would like. When their parents have to face issues in career entry, restricted advancement and lower wages due to language insufficiency, as well as lack of social networks and qualifications not being recognized, young adult immigrants are often channelled into the same vicious cycle due to lack of role modelling and networking. This article attempts to address these challenges by reporting on a pilot mentoring program among ethnic Chinese in Vancouver that aims to empower well-adjusted mid-life immigrants to walk with young adult immigrants intentionally for a crucial period in their life transition. The social worker plays an important role in recruiting, screening, training and monitoring the entire mentoring process, and ensuring successful and ethical practice. The project shows that when both mentors and mentees are ready to commit and be available, open and trustful, mentees can be helped by the caring and insightful experience. At the same time, mentors also gained from the opportunity of helping others and having a chance to crystallize their own experiences.

Keywords: Mentoring • young adult immigrants • transition • integration • training • career

Limited effort has been made to integrate and support young adult immigrants who have come to this country with their families in the last 10 to 20 years. Many people imagine that these youngsters should be able to blend well into the new country, integrated as well as their local-born counterparts, when they receive education here. On the contrary, however, many young adult immigrants, brought up by parents with different cultural values and few networks linking them to the mainstream society, are prone to being bewildered by the challenges they have to face.

The purpose of this article is to showcase how mentoring has helped young adult immigrants of ethnic Chinese origin to overcome some of their career and developmental challenges. Some literature relating to immigrants' difficulties in career entry and advancement will be reviewed,

the contributions of the social worker in the entire process will be discussed, and an evaluation of the mentoring program will be presented.

Challenges of young adult immigrants

The needs and developmental tasks of early adulthood are multiple: choosing a career, forming an intimate relationship, separating from parents and finding a life goal, to name the more significant ones. This article focuses primarily on career choice and advancement of young immigrants.

Twenty years ago, few systematic studies regarding immigrants were conducted in Canada. But the glass ceiling concept was pointed out by the U.S. Department of Labor

in 1991. This concept is defined as “those artificial barriers based on attitudinal and organizational bias that prevents qualified individuals from advancing upward in their organization into management-level positions.” In addition, a bimodal distribution of occupational highs and lows among immigrants was observed when comparing one well-off group, including doctors, engineers and other professionals, with a low-wage group working in restaurants, small retail shops and labour jobs (Thatchenkery & Cheng, 1997).

contribute to barriers. They stated the constricted pipeline analogy is applicable in Canada. Not only does this have a damaging effect on the individuals but also the glass ceiling has a direct negative impact on the employees’ organizational commitment, job satisfaction and job performance (Ensher, Grant-Vallone, & Donaldson, 2001). Woo (2000) explained these barriers are due to the following factors: a) a dual ladder; b) lack of mentoring; c) lack of management training and access to critical developmental assignments; d) biased performance evaluations; e) cultural differences; and f) “old boys” networks.

Family help is often not available to young immigrants. A significant number of parents, particularly fathers, return to their country of origin to work because of slim job prospects in the new country.

Family help is often not available to young immigrants. A significant number of parents, particularly fathers, return to their country of origin to work because of slim job prospects in the new country, leaving their children behind. Of the families where the parents remain with their families, many have chosen to work and socialize in their own ethnic circle, blending into the mainstream being more difficult than they had imagined. Although Canada is proud of the apparent harmony of its “tapestry” phenomenon, there is in actuality no practical policy to guide its citizens to live multiculturalism. Without helpful modelling from their elders, many young immigrants are channelled back to the vicious cycle of lower wages, restricted advancement and isolation.

A Vancouver social service agency reported in a labour market study that the unemployment rate of new immigrant university graduates was four times higher than local born graduates, mainly because of language barriers (Chan & Chan, 2007); another agency reported that most immigrants need 10 years to achieve similar pay, language skills and ability comparable to local-born individuals (Chan & Chan, 2007). Other studies have also found that new immigrants’ income is generally lower than the income of the general population.

The mentoring program reported in this article attempts to address some of these issues. The unique features of this project allow mid-life mentors to share experiences with young adult immigrants in order to help them build their careers, work through the hurdles of cultural differences and develop ways to better relate with their family members.

Wong & Wong (2006) pointed out that within the internal pipeline of business or corporation there are formal policies—official decisions made by those in power—as well as informal aspects such as network circles, social functions and office events that

Mentoring and roles of the social worker

The classic definition of mentoring involves letting an older experienced guide who is acceptable to the younger person help this person ease through the transition to

adulthood using a mix of support and challenges. Philip (2000) noted, “In this sense, it is a developmental relationship in which the young person is inducted into the world of adulthood.”

After reviewing more than 200 studies, Zeldin and colleagues (1995) concluded that, in order to successfully pass through adolescence, youth need “access to safe places, challenging experiences, and caring people on a daily basis.” Mentoring is often seen as an important avenue for fulfilling these needs. Rhodes (2002) points out that researchers and practitioners have actually shifted their attention from the prevention of specific disorders to a more general focus on positive aspects of youth development over the last 10 years. She identifies three important ways that mentoring works: a) enhancing social skills and emotional well-being; b) improving cognitive skills through dialogue and listening; and c) serving as a role model and advocate. In their evaluation of Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, researchers at Public/Private Ventures in Philadelphia recognized the help provided by mature and caring mentors to youngsters in need. Encouraged by these studies, this mentoring project aims to provide additional socializing agents, role modelling and intergenerational relationships to support young adult immigrants within a designated period of time of their life transition.

How is mentoring different from social work? What role can a social worker play in a mentoring program? Mentoring is based on positive psychology, is forward looking, focused on building up the person and is developmental and preventative in nature (Rhodes, 2002). Mentoring is not meant to involve individual counselling when a treatment mode may be costly and draining for the social work profession. As most young adult immigrants cannot be classified as having psycho-social problems, giving support and insight to them as they integrate into the mainstream would be more appropriate. Social workers—with their professional knowledge and skills in human

behaviour, small group dynamics and community development—can make a difference through lobbying, screening, training and mobilizing suitable people to become mentors. Through continued monitoring, support and by sustaining them, the social worker can ascertain an ethical and responsible relationship between the mentor and the mentee and ensure that the mentor does not manipulate or do harm to the mentee.

Youth need “access to safe places, challenging experiences, and caring people on a daily basis.” Mentoring is often seen as an important avenue for fulfilling these needs.

Description of the mentoring program

There are two stages in this mentoring program: the six-month pilot-project and the twelve-month mentoring program, involving recruitment and matching, orientation and training, follow-up and evaluation. Practice research was built into the program to study mentoring behaviour, competencies of mentors, the nature of issues worked with, result of the mentoring relationship and strengths and weaknesses of the program.

Phase I: Three focus groups were held in 2007 for members of a faith-based youth society to discuss the idea of mentoring, and to identify needs and concerns. Nine young adult immigrants showed interest in becoming mentees, including five females and four males. They were all bilingual (Cantonese and English), born in Asian cities and had

resided in Canada for an average of 15 years. Eight were single and one was married. They all had post-secondary education and had worked for a few years. At the same time, mentors were recruited through personal contact by the head of the agency. Three females and six males who have volunteered in the agency were invited as mentors. They all demonstrated good adjustment in the immigration process and were observed to be caring and mature people. The mentors had all migrated from Hong Kong, were bilingual (Cantonese and English) and had resided in Canada from 8 to 40 years. They were all married with children, in mid-life and had postsecondary education. Mentors and mentees were matched based on the field of their career, gender, interests, personal preference and personal temperament.

Phase II: In February 2008, mentors participated in a three-hour orientation and training session covering three aspects:

- (1) The ethics and practice principles of mentoring, such as mutual respect, best interest of mentee, confidentiality, genuineness, individualization, self-determination and empowerment.
- (2) The mentoring process involving relationship building, exploration, goal attainment and termination.
- (3) Ten communication skills useful for mentoring (demonstrated by role playing). These skills are empathy, questioning, self-disclosure, summarizing, problem-solving steps, modelling, positive reinforcement, direct influence, confrontation and information giving.

In the training session, one mentor also shared his experience of being mentored by someone from his workplace. During the lunch break, mentors were introduced to mentees for mingling. In the afternoon, mentees met in a small group to process their thoughts, feelings and expectations, and to get prepared for entering the mentoring relationship.

Phase III to IV: Mentors and mentees were contacted every two months by phone and email to maintain a relationship and to sort out any obstacles. At the end of the six-month pilot project, mentors and mentees met in separate focus groups to express what they had gained, their expectations and any difficulties encountered. Mentors were asked to fill out a self-evaluation report, and mentees were asked to fill out a program evaluation form. The program then continued for another 12 months. Phone calls and emails were exchanged with mentors and mentees to maintain contact and periodically monitor their progress. The entire program officially ended in September 2009. Once again, mentors and mentees were asked to provide the same evaluation information.

As most young adult immigrants cannot be classified as having psychosocial problems, giving support and insight to them as they integrate into the mainstream would be more appropriate.

Results of the program and its evaluation

Five of the nine pairs reported successful mentoring experiences. Two pairs met only a few times and were quite inactive after the initial six months. Two other pairs had not met at all. Factors related to success included a) commitment from both parties; b) availability of both parties for face-to-face meetings, phone contacts or email transactions; c) openness and readiness on the part of both parties; d) involvement of the mentor's spouse to further enrich the socialization process;

and e) personal qualities of mentors, such as previous training in helping people, expertise in certain work areas, etc.

Difficulties in the mentoring experience involved a) lack of “feel” between the pair; b) one party or both parties being very busy with other commitments; c) mentors have difficulty gaining trust from and identifying the needs and concerns of mentees; d) mentors lack of knowledge and skills relating to young adults; and e) limitations of the one-on-one relationship. For the two mentees who had not been contacted by their mentors, some follow-up work was done with them to process their feelings of disappointment and abandonment.

Mentees in the five successful pairs all experienced growth and a positive relationship with the mentors who had inspired them in different areas of life. These areas are, in order of importance: career development, marital or dating relationship and spiritual direction or life goal-setting. Although the mentees’ gain is directly related to their personal needs and the competencies of the different mentors, “having someone to talk to and to walk with me in time of life transition” was one of the many things they appreciated most. Some mentees were so inspired by the relationship that they wanted to invest in mentoring someone in the future. This suggests that a trustful, intentional and supportive relationship is central to mentoring.

Mentors also gained from the exercise. The five mentors who carried on until the end of the program all said they would continue contact with their mentees periodically in the future and that they were prepared to take on other mentees in the next round of the mentoring program. All mentors evaluated themselves positively in the areas of listening, forming friendly relationships, modelling personal integrity and setting boundaries. At one point or another in the process, they were asked to reflect on how they had related with their own young adult children and also on their own needs of entering retirement and old age. These findings attest to Frank Riessman’s

helper therapy principle (1965), which states that people help themselves through the process of being genuinely helpful to others. This on the one hand best explains the rewards of mentoring and, on the other hand, echoes Sipe’s (1998) idea of a successful mentoring program being made up of a) screening; b) orientation and training; and c) support and supervision.

Conclusion

Immigration involves tremendous and long-term adjustment. Multiculturalism remains more a motto than an operational policy in Canada, and programs that assist newcomers are often put under strain due to budget cuts. It is like a survival of the fittest exercise when immigrants and their families are expected to move on their own. The small-scale pilot mentoring project attempts to address to challenges of young adult immigrants around career, relationships and life goal issues. Less-than-ideal responses from or manipulation by either party will do more harm than good; thus social workers have important roles to play in order to ascertain safety and success. This is done by recruiting mentors and mentees who are ready to commit, and those who will give training and provide supervision to ensure ethical relationships and constructive communication. Evaluation feedback from both mentors and mentees is essential.

This project shows that well-adjusted mid-life immigrants can be empowered to walk with young adult immigrants intentionally for a period of time. When both parties are ready to commit, and are available, open and trusting, mentees can be helped by the caring and insightful experience. At the same time, mentors also gained from the opportunity to help others and to have the opportunity to crystallize their own experiences.

This program was conducted among ethnic Chinese and non-related people, and involved one-on-one relationships. Group mentoring and ways to embrace mainstream mentors as

well as related people such as members of the extended family, religious affiliations and the workplace can also be explored. When immigrants are integrated into Canadian society with greater networking opportunities, supportive relationships and a better grasp of the social, economic and political situations, the experience is not only favourable to the well-being of the individuals and their families but also contributes to the productivity and cohesion of the country at large.

References

- Chan, C.T., & Chan, S.M. (2007, September). TV news interview. Retrieved from www.SUCCESS.org
- Ensher, E., Grant-Vallone, E., & Donaldson, S. (2001). Effects of perceived discrimination on job satisfaction, organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behaviour, and grievances. *Human Resources Development Quarterly*, 12(1), 53–72.
- Philip, K. (2002). Mentoring and young people. *The Encyclopaedia of Informal Education*. Infed. Retrieved from <http://www.infed.org/learning/mentors/mentoring.htm>
- Rhodes, J.E. (2002). *Stand by Me: The Risks and Rewards of Mentoring Today's Youth*. London: Harvard University Press.
- Riessman, F. (1965). The helper-therapy principle. *Social Work*, 10(2), 27–32.
- Sipe, C.L. (1998). Mentoring adolescents: What have we learned. In J. B. Grossman (Ed.), *Contemporary Issues in Mentoring*. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures.
- Thatchenkery, T., & Cheng, C. (1997). Seeing beneath the surface to appreciate what “is”: A call for a balanced inquiry and consciousness raising regarding Asian Americans in Organizations. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 33(3), 397–406.
- U.S. Department of Labor. (1991). *A report on the glass ceiling initiative*. Washington, DC.
- Wong, L. & Wong, C. (2006). Chinese engineers in Canada: A “model minority”? and experiences and perceptions of the glass ceiling. *Journal of Women and Minorities in Science and Engineering*, 12(4), 253–273.
- Woo, D. (2000). *Glass ceilings and Asian Americans: The new face of workplace barriers*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.
- Zeldin, S. & Price, L. (Eds.). (1995). Creating supportive communities for adolescent development: Challenges to scholars. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 10(1).

Biographical note

Grace Po-chee Ko has taught social work at the City University of Hong Kong and the University of British Columbia. She currently works as an advisor to social service agencies, and trains lay people helpers and family therapists.

The Politics of Place

Integrating Iranian Women into Canadian Graduate Institutions

Zahra Hojati

Abstract

Higher education is a reflection of society, and vice versa (Bannerji, 2000). Educated immigrants, including women, may have the privilege of entering Canada, but this privilege does not help them to integrate into their new social environment, or into the Canadian educational system. The challenges and struggles that educated immigrant women encounter may affect their sense of belonging in our society: they may experience feelings of loneliness, powerlessness, and vulnerability. This unfinished research on Middle Eastern people studying in Canadian graduate schools focuses particularly on the situation of Iranian women. The goal is to provide information to allow policy makers and social workers to understand these women's experience, within the broader picture of their Middle Eastern origins. This article explores the challenges of Iranian women graduate students, and attempts to assess how Canada can develop an effective strategy for integrating educated immigrants into society in general, and specifically within the context of higher education. To conclude, a possible solution is offered for the challenges these women face.

Keywords: Canadian graduate schools • Middle Eastern women • Iranian immigrant educated women • adaptation • integration • challenges • individualism vs. collectivism

Insecurity in the Middle Eastern countries often forces educated people to emigrate to countries they perceive as safe (Collins, 1998, Mohanty, 2004). Included in this migration into Canadian society (CIC, 2007) are Iranian women who have experienced injustice and patriarchy in Iran. In this article (part of an unfinished research thesis), I explore the challenges these women face in Canadian society, particularly in its institutions of higher education. I use an integrative, anti-racist, feminist perspective to analyze the complexities of their struggles (Dei, 2005; Dua, 2003; Ng, 2004; Wane, 2004), allowing the source of oppression to become apparent. Since this research focuses on marginalized women, I use a feminist-standpoint theory as

the methodology for contextualizing the women's voices (Harding, 1995).

The research includes interviews with 11 educated Iranian immigrant women during the summer of 2008. All participants hold at least a bachelor's degree from an Iranian university, and all started graduate studies in an Ontario institution after 2001. Seven of the women are enrolled in master's programs, and four in doctoral programs. Their fields of study vary from science, health, and engineering, to education and the humanities. Participants' ages range from 26 to 55, and their marital status ranges from single to married, remarried, or divorced. Some have children, some do not. All the quotes given in this article are taken from personal communications with the participants.

For women enrolled in graduate studies in a foreign country, adaptation requires not only adjusting to a new national culture, but also learning to understand the culture of a new educational system—the school’s programs, courses, supervisors, and much more.



My research findings are composed of six interrelated themes of the immigrant experience: adaptation, stereotyping, discrimination, being silenced, resistance, and belonging. In this article, I explore the first aspect, adaptation into a new environment, and the associated struggles the women have. (At the same time, however, one important finding is the happiness that participants feel about being able to continue their studies in a Canadian graduate school, despite the negative experiences they encounter.) My objective of this research is to illustrate the experience of these Iranian immigrant women graduate students, who are often made to feel both invisible and whose voices are often silenced. In this article, in fact, I attempt to make heard those silenced voices. I also hope to become part of the dialogue on social change at several levels: for social workers, for universities, and for the policy makers of Canadian society.

Adapting to Canadian society, and to graduate school

One of an immigrant’s main challenges is always to adapt to a new environment. For

women enrolled in graduate studies in a foreign country, adaptation requires not only adjusting to a new national culture, but also learning to understand the culture of a new educational system—the school’s programs, courses, supervisors, and much more. This can be a difficult process for a person with no experience of either Canadian culture or the Canadian school system. Even negotiating such domestic matters as transportation, shopping, and so on, can be stressful; consider, then, the difficulties of finding one’s way around a complex educational system. One participant, Leila, describes her experience:

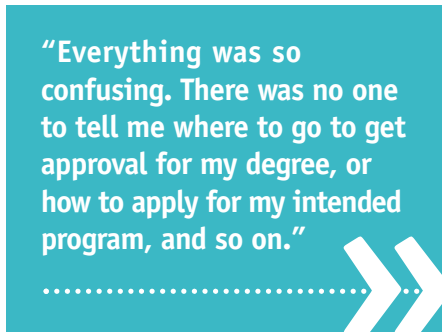
I had to write TOEFL, and also a professional exam. It was a really hard exam. But my main problem was unfamiliarity with the Canadian system. How should I apply for graduate school? I did not have a clue how to do my work. I did not even know where to go ask questions about graduate school. I was not familiar with the streets. I could get off the bus when I saw the street name and then look for the destination for about an hour. Everything was so confusing. There was no one to tell me where to go to get approval for my degree, or how to apply for my intended program, and so on.

Coming from a Middle Eastern society to a North American society, which is very dissimilar in its cultural, educational, economic, and political structures, is an obvious cause of anxiety for an Iranian woman. Even though Leila is a skilled worker—she and her husband are educated, and had in fact lived in Canada many years ago—they still had difficulty navigating the culture. This dilemma is expressed by Sarah, another participant: “In Iran, I was familiar with the [school] system, but here I was like a stranger, and did not know what to do.”

The same sense of being lost and confused during the entry stage of their settlement in Canada was expressed by other participants, including Hoda—who subsequently spent two years (and a lot of money) to get information about various universities:

I did not know what I had to do to pursue my studies. I lacked information, and I did not know that at first, for graduate school, I needed to find a supervisor; besides that, I thought the only university was Toronto! So at the beginning I only focused on the University of Toronto, and this issue bothered me a lot and postponed my entry to university for two years.

“Everything was so confusing. There was no one to tell me where to go to get approval for my degree, or how to apply for my intended program, and so on.”



An important point, therefore, is that when an educated immigrant woman enters Canada, her previous experience and knowledge may influence her vision of the new environment, but will likely not equip her for the challenges of an unfamiliar educational system. Lack of adequate information leads to lost time and money in the new society, searching for the right path. As Maheen relates:

Immigration for me was like a big storm... like being in a military service. This made me stronger and helped me get to know myself more. It is not only about financial issues, it is cultural and emotional as well. Here, even finding a friend was a challenge. When I came here, my old friends were not like how they used to be. They had changed a lot... or they didn't have time for me. They had to work hard. Living alone is very difficult. Sometimes I would find myself just making noise at home by turning on the TV and radio—just to make me feel I am not alone.

Unlike many other societies in the world, in Canada individualism is more important than collectivism; and this puts pressure on Middle Eastern women, who grew up in a collectivist society. Maheen tries to use this contradiction as a source of strength, and to use her agency for overcoming barriers. Some immigrant women are able to overcome loneliness by raising their own “active being” (Lorde, 1984). As active beings, they desire an active and meaningful process, rather than being absorbed into the mainstream culture and becoming passive and vulnerable: Maheen noticed that most of her old friends were now focused mostly on their own survival. “When I came here, my old friends were not like they used to be. They had changed a lot, or they didn't have time for me. They had to work hard,” Although Maheen had many friends, they appeared to think only of their own challenges, leaving her to look after herself. As Maheen also observed:

To me, this country is great in terms of getting information, but [how] do you get it, when, from whom? Where can you use it? No one is there to take your hand and inform you about what you need. There are different resources, like Skill for Changes, the YMCA, but [knowing] how you use it is so tough. It is like cooking; maybe all the ingredients are there, but it is not clear how to make the food.

According to Maheen, there is no organization to actively engage newcomers in the school environment. As she said, even when information is available, knowing how to use it is a challenge. Another woman, Mahvash, shares a similar experience:

The problem was that there was not any exact guidance for what we have to do, and how. Those things make our work difficult. I suppose we can't work at all in Canada, though after two years I found out that I could work as a —, not a —, but it was too late. And my problem was not only language, how to speak

English, but also how to adapt to the new environment. I did not have enough information....So I decided to gradually achieve my goals while continuing my education. But we are under stress here and we have problems adapting to society and those difficulties affect our children as well.

Some information is necessary for newcomers who are pursuing post-secondary education, but this information is not easily available. One might describe the phenomenon as the “pseudo-inclusion” of immigrant women.

Clearly, such experiences illustrate the need for an effective guidance system in graduate schools that can answer questions for prospective students. Student services at universities cater only to enrolled students, not potential ones. Clearly, there is a missing link here with the immigration system: when educated women are accepted for entry into Canada, there is a lack of appropriate further assistance. Some information is necessary for newcomers who are pursuing post-secondary education, but this information is not easily available. One might describe the phenomenon as the “pseudo-inclusion” of immigrant women. This absence of help is not limited to education information or language improvement; it also includes the issue of cultural integration. Mahvash did not know that she could use her previous education to gain employment in Canada, because she was not familiar with the system; she did not work, because she did not know that she could work. The effect of this

hidden process on women like Mahvash could be an important subject of discussion for social workers. Maheen also has issues with cultural adaptation. She explains in a sad tone of voice:

To me, in practice, mentoring in here is so important. Immigration has lots of ups and downs; it is not only language. I don't want to say it is a cultural shock either. I have a stable and firm personality, so I cannot easily accept some values from another culture because I respect my own values. So, for a person that has a stable personality it is hard to assimilate into a new system. If we had grown up here and our personality had been shaped here, adaptation to school would be easier, but for me, adaptation was really very hard.

In terms of the graduate school experience, two salient points emerge from the women's experiences. The first is the need for guiding newcomers who are potential candidates for graduate school. Canadian students can attend university fairs, but newcomers cannot. This is one of the many reasons why immigrants feel like strangers, not included in the Canadian education system. The second point is mentoring, a significant issue in graduate school. Many students suffer from a lack of mentorship to help them in pursuing their studies (Acker, 2001; Carty, 1991; Dowdy, 2008); and if even Canadian-born students feel that this service is inadequate, it can be even more challenging for immigrant women.

Maheen also talks about the issue of integration into a new culture. She wants to hold onto her identity as an Iranian woman, and this resistance makes adaptation much more difficult. The resulting sense of exclusion becomes more prominent when women have children. Mahvash, who is also a mother, said that the challenges of adaptation were also felt by her family.

This research shows that although the participants' education allowed them to come to Canada, after they arrived they were left on their own to navigate the school system and

society. There is a lack of association between universities and Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) to help such women integrate. Policy makers and social workers could take certain steps to help engage racialized immigrants, and help them to feel that Canada is their home.

As educated immigrant people, including women, enter Canada through the citizenship and immigration process, what is needed is an active and meaningful connection between CIC and the institutions of higher education. A valuable resource would be having information on the CIC website, to help immigrants obtain information on different universities. The site could even help potential immigrants to learn some of the basics about their future country, before they leave home—allowing them to be better prepared when they actually arrive. Moreover, CIC could join forces with the universities (perhaps by awarding scholarships) to research the challenges of immigrant students, thus producing more information that could also be posted on the CIC website to help newcomers. Another possibility would be to link the CIC website with other sites, thereby enabling it to act as a search engine for immigrants to find reliable sources of information.

In addition, a dynamic connection between social workers and universities would facilitate access to information for newcomers—especially if social workers were able to guide newcomers in searching the Internet for appropriate online information.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of my research, I have provided a number of recommendations for policy makers and social workers. Since the latter implement the decisions of the former, their role is significant in helping newcomers integrate into their new environment. However, according to the participants in this research, integration requires not just getting information, or the ability to speak English: it also requires social, cultural,

educational, and economic involvement. To remove the barriers for integration into society, social workers are valuable resources to help newcomers adapt, both into the school setting and into society as a whole. Some suggestions for social workers include:

- Reaching out actively to newcomers, and offering their services through national, cultural, and religious gatherings in the newcomers’ communities. Racism, sexism, and other “-isms” should not interfere with a social worker’s approach to newcomers.

Resistance makes adaptation much more difficult. The resulting sense of exclusion becomes more prominent when women have children.

- Making their services visible and available through public spaces such as libraries, schools, and other public spheres. Through the creation of hobbies and entertainment, newcomers can become involved in other newcomers’ stories and challenges of adaptation, and thus realize that they are not alone. A strong network of newcomers will also help them gain further opportunities. The race, class, gender, nationality, religion, and language of newcomers should not be barriers to this involvement.
- Addressing individual newcomers’ needs by referring them to the right social services, which may be located through the social workers’ network.
- Becoming knowledgeable about the demographics of the newcomer population, since knowing their education, skills, and culture will help connect social workers with the people they serve.

Graduate-school university fairs for prospective immigrant students could provide realistic introductory information.

- Acting as mentors for educated immigrants, to help them pursue their education. A connection between social workers and academia could assist newcomers in settling into the school environment. Institutions such as graduate schools should have social workers on campus to assist newcomers.
- Helping educated women—who often suffer from a lack of LINC and ESL classes that are adequate to their education—to find appropriate classes, by connecting them with colleges and universities.
- Helping newcomers to find work as volunteers (perhaps through resources such as workingincanada.gc.ca and settlement.org) in jobs related to their professional fields. This could help newcomers integrate into the labour market, and improve their English.
- Expanding newcomers' awareness of services through broadcast media. There is quite enough information in some Iranian magazines, but social workers could broaden this information to include radio and television.

Government also has a role to play in facilitating the integration of newcomers. Below are some suggestions for Canadian policy makers.

- Although there are some important government websites for newcomers (such as the Statistics Canada page at

statcan.gc.ca), a link between the CIC site and university sites would also be helpful for providing information to potential students. Such links could also introduce mentors and graduate students.

- Graduate-school university fairs for prospective immigrant students could provide realistic introductory information. These “virtual events” could be posted through links from the CIC website, as well as through the schools themselves; and they would enable foreign women students to get involved in their future graduate departments, become familiar with faculty members and other students, and ask questions online.
- Finally, as all immigrants enter a country through the airport, it would make sense to provide the information that immigrants need in some location directly at the airport (perhaps in different languages). The first few days in a new country are crucial for newcomers, so this would be a significant gesture to show them that their new society is waiting for them.

References

- Acker, S. (2001). *The hidden curriculum of dissertation advising*. In E. Margolis (Ed.), *The Hidden Curriculum in Higher Education*. New York: Routledge.
- Bannerji, H. (2000). Faculty voices. In The York Stories Collective (Ed.), *York Stories: Women in Higher Education* (pp. 94–115). Toronto: TSAR Publications.
- Canada. Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC). (2007). *Recent immigrants in metropolitan areas: Toronto—A comparative profile based on the 2001 census. Part A: immigrants and recent immigrants*. Retrieved July 17, 2009, from <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/research/census2001/toronto/parta.asp>
- Carty, L. (1991). Black women in academia: A statement from the periphery. In H. Bannerji, L. Carty, K. Delhi, S. Heald & K. McKenna (Eds.), *Unsettling Relations: The University as a Site of Feminist Struggles* (pp.13–44). Toronto: Women's Press.

Collins, P.H. (1998). The power of self-definition. In M. F. Rogers (Ed.), *Contemporary feminist theory: A text/reader* (pp. 379–393). Boston: McGraw-Hill.

Dei, S.G. (2005). The intersection of race, class, and gender in the anti-racism discourse. In V. Zawilski & C. Levine-Rasky (Eds.), *Inequality in Canada: A Reader on the Intersection of Gender, Race, Class* (pp. 17–35). Toronto: Oxford University Press.

Dowdy, J.K. (2008). *PhD Stories: Conversations with my Sister*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Dua, E. (2003). Introduction. In E. Dua & A. Robertson (Eds.), *Scratching the Surface: Canadian Anti-racist Feminist Thought* (pp. 7–34). Toronto: Women's Press.

Hall, S. (1998). Presentation at the UCLA Forum "On Veiling and the Media," Los Angeles, May 20, sponsored by UCLA G. S. von Grunebaum Center for Near Eastern Studies and New York and Columbia Universities.

Harding, S. (1995). Subjectivity, experience, and knowledge: An epistemology from/for Rainbow Coalition Politics. In J. Roof & R. Wiegman (Eds.), *Questions of Authority: The Politics of Discourse and Epistemology in Feminist Thought* (pp. 97–108).

Lorde, A. (1984). The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. In A. Lorde (Ed.), *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (pp. 110–113). Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press.

Mohanty, C.T. (2004). *Feminism without borders: Decolonizing theory, practicing solidarity* (4th printing). Durham (NC): Duke University Press.

Ng, R. (2004). *An embodied integrative anti-racist feminism*. Article presented at the Centre for Women's Studies in Education. Popular Feminism presentation, 20th Anniversary Series. No. 10. February. OISE. University of Toronto.

Wane, N. (2004, February). *The politics of naming feminism: The debate continues*. Article presented at the Centre for Women's Studies in Education. Popular Feminism presentation, 20th anniversary. No. 10. OISE. University of Toronto.

Biographical notes

Zahra Hojati is currently a doctoral student in the Higher Education/Women's Studies program at Theory and Policy Studies in the Department of Education at Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), University of Toronto. Her area of interest is using an anti-colonial and anti-racist feminist perspective to challenge the roles of imperialism and patriarchy in oppressing Middle Eastern women. She is currently completing her thesis, which focuses on the challenges of Iranian women graduate students in Canadian academia.

Chinese Immigrant Youth and the Justice System in Canada

Siu-Ming Kwok · Dora Mei-ying Tam

Abstract

This article presents part of the findings of a qualitative study relating to the experience of 36 Chinese immigrant youth in the Canadian criminal justice system. The findings show that perceived blocked opportunities, cultural values, crime involvement, and support systems are all structural contexts for their experiences in the criminal justice system. These findings support the policy formulation and service delivery for this population, which should address systemic discrimination, include family in the prevention and intervention initiatives and enhance service providers' cultural competency and knowledge of Chinese gangs.

Keywords: Immigrant youth · Chinese · criminal justice system

Most research studies on delinquency in Canada are primarily focused on youth from mainstream cultural groups (Martell, 2002; Moyer, 2005; Wong, 2000). The limited literature on youth from ethnic minority/immigrant groups is a challenge for social workers in understanding and addressing the needs of these populations. This article reports on a qualitative study of the experiences of 36 Chinese immigrant youth in the criminal justice system in Vancouver and Toronto, in an attempt to fill the knowledge gap in current literature and to explore the promising practices for this population, on both policy and service delivery levels. This study focuses mainly on Chinese immigrant youth but the findings might be relevant to youth from other ethnic immigrant groups.

Literature review

Developmental stresses of ethnic minority immigrant youth are different from those experienced by youth of dominant cultures (Martell, 2002). Examples of these stresses

include a disadvantaged minority status and acculturation challenges (Kwok, 2009; 2008; Pih & Mao, 2005). Studies have already demonstrated that members of the Chinese community are less trusting of the criminal justice system than their white counterparts (Commission on Systemic Racism in the Ontario Criminal Justice System, 1995; Kwok, 2009; 2008) and were only marginally positive in their perception of the police (Chow, 2002). In addition, there is a growing concern, within law enforcement agencies and in the general public, over gun-related gang activities of ethnic minority youth (Doob & Gartner, 2005). Criminal Intelligence Service Canada (2002) and Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada (2003) reported that Chinese gangs have actively recruited members from immigrant youth and were among the fastest-growing Asian gangs in Canada.

Notwithstanding the unique developmental stresses faced by immigrant youth and public concerns, there is a paucity of research studies in Canada on ethnic immigrant youth who are involved in crimes in general, and on Chinese


immigrant youth in particular (Bania, 2009; Kwok & Tam, 2004). A few studies have focused on Chinese immigrant youth in conflict with the law in the United States over the last three decades; however, these findings are far from conclusive (Tsunokai, 2005; Tsunokai & Kposowa, 2002).

In late 1970s, scholarly works focused on verifying the longstanding criminological theories, such as social disorganization theory¹, on Chinese immigrant youth (Rice, 1977; Tsunokai & Kposowa, 2002). However, the findings in support of these theories on Chinese immigrant youth were mixed (Knox, McCurrie, Laskey & Tromanhauser, 1996). Contemporary researchers, therefore, began to investigate whether distinctive cultural qualities, together with other social factors (e.g., structural racial discrimination), could better explain crime involvement of Chinese immigrant youth. Sheu (1986) found that the best approach to understanding Chinese immigrant youth and crimes was to integrate social control theory² with a cultural disorganization perspective. Sheu suggested that Chinese values that underscore obedience and filial piety are often eroded as Chinese immigrant youth adjust to a new culture that emphasizes individuality and independence. These Chinese immigrant youth could neither be socialized in Chinese culture nor could they fully integrate to the mainstream culture. Thus the struggle with the acculturation process is suggested as one of the factors associated with the delinquency of Chinese immigrant youth (Chin, 1996; Kendis & Kendis, 1976; Song, 1988).

Other researchers have sought to explain the connection between Chinese immigrant youth and crime involvement by combining social disorganization theory with differential opportunity theory³ (Chin, 1996), social control theory with social learning theory⁴ (Wang, 1996), or subcultural theory⁵ with social disorganization theory (Song, 1988). Despite these efforts, there is still no consensus on a dominant theory that would help understand

and explain the criminal behaviours of Chinese immigrant youth in western countries, and even less so on a descriptive or explanatory model designed to help understand the experiences of Chinese immigrant youth in the Canadian criminal justice system (Kwok, 2009). In response to this knowledge gap, the primary objective of this study is to develop a theoretical framework designed to understand Chinese youth in the criminal justice system in Canada and to explore the promising practices for this population.

There is still no consensus on a dominant theory that would help understand and explain the criminal behaviours of Chinese immigrant youth in western countries, and even less so on a descriptive or explanatory model designed to help understand the experiences of Chinese immigrant youth in the Canadian criminal justice system.



Methods

Grounded theory⁶ was used to understand the interactions of different social actors and the process of change of the experiences of Chinese immigrant youth in the criminal justice system. Participants were located from within ethno-specific community organizations in Vancouver and Toronto. Thirty-six Chinese immigrant youth who had been involved in the criminal justice system participated in this study. They

ranged from 14 to 17 years of age and had been in Canada between 3 and 10 years. The offenses include robbery, assault, extortion, drug trafficking, and possession of firearms. The offenders received sentences ranging from probation orders and community services, to incarceration. Participant recruitment was guided by theoretical sampling, which is a data-gathering process driven by concepts comparison with the purpose of discovering variations between concepts (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Semi-structured individual interviews were used for data collection and each interview lasted approximately two hours. All interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Data were coded using open, axial, and selective coding. Specifically, the researchers read through all the interviews to identify common themes, after which the themes were coded and data were queried for instances of the same, or similar, phenomena. Data were then translated into working hypotheses that were refined until all instances of contradictions, similarities, and differences were explained, thus increasing the dependability and consistency of the findings (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Following this method of data analysis, four main themes were identified: perceived blocked opportunities, cultural values, criminal involvement, and support systems. These represent the structural contexts of the experiences of Chinese immigrant youth in the criminal justice system.

Results

Perceived blocked opportunities

All participants spoke of their frustration regarding the perceived barriers to success because of their status as visible minorities. They generally felt that they were not treated in a fair manner. For example, teachers usually assumed that they were affiliated to Asian gangs if they saw that their Chinese friends were waiting for them in a luxury car outside the school.

Teachers usually assumed that they were affiliated to Asian gangs if they saw that their Chinese friends were waiting for them in a luxury car outside the school.

Youths also felt they had received harsher punishments because of their racial background. One participant stated:

What's wrong with self-defence? He [the white student] started the fight. He got suspended [from class] only a few days, and I got [suspended] two weeks. I was put in an alternative class and he [the white student] went back to regular class....I am a Chinese; [they think I am] a gangster. (Participant 11)

Furthermore, it was felt that school had taken advantage of their immigrant parents who had no knowledge of school administration and policy of suspension and withdrawal. Another participant stated the following:

[The school] asked my mother to sign [a letter of voluntary withdrawal from the school]. They [school] knew that my parents are immigrants....My mother knows nothing [about the school] and didn't speak much English. She just nodded and said yes to them [the school]....I don't think they [the school] would have done it to other [Caucasian] parents. (Participant 31)

It would also seem that police often pick on Chinese youth when they hang out in a group at night. Participants complained that they were treated with disrespect. One of the respondents said:

He [police] dragged me to the ground.... My friend talked back and said we know

our own rights...They [police] choked my friend's neck and shouted at him: "If you don't like it, go back [to your country]." (Participant 17)

Cultural values

Internalizing problems and stressing about family connections were themes that frequently came up in the interviews. Chinese immigrant parents hold authority in high regard. They attributed their children's misbehaviour to their own inadequate parenting rather than to systemic discrimination or institutional inequalities. As one participant put it:

They [my parents] just didn't see this as discrimination. They thought the school was right to punish me. Why should I complain? (Participant 14)

Not only the parents, but also the immigrant youth considered that they should be partly responsible for their misbehaviours and share the blame. They considered that they were not in a position to request any changes because they were immigrants and visible minorities, and now, even worse, they had violated the law. A respondent stated that:

We [Chinese] are second citizens in this country....Whites does not like us [Chinese]....[Now] I broke the law. They [whites] have every reason to hate us. (Participant 12)

Regardless of their degree of criminal involvement, all participants stressed that family connection is paramount in their lives.

[When I was arrested by the police] the first thing came to my mind was what would the reaction of my family be....Family is the number one priority for us [Chinese].... Without family, we are only isolated islands. (Participant 1)


Most immigrant parents were hesitant to approach ethnic-specific organizations for help, yet had no knowledge of the services offered by mainstream organizations. Still,

the families would not rule out the possibility of requesting assistance from mainstream organizations if they deemed it necessary.

My mother went everywhere: school, police station...community centre when she thought [they] could help me. (Participant 1)

My parents didn't speak much English, but they went to school and talked to the principal....They [parents] wanted me to stay in school. (Participant 9)

"My mother went everywhere: school, police station...community centre when she thought [they] could help me."
(Participant 1)



Criminal involvement

The data revealed that all of the participants' first brush with the law happened within a group context. Group loyalty is the major reason behind criminal involvement.

We always fought other gangs....We ran into XX [a Chinese gang] downtown. We beat them up. You must fight along with your friends. It was a loyalty thing. (Participant 1)

Some participants turned to gangs for emotional support when the family was not able to or did not know how to deal with the incident.

She [mother] nagged at me every day. "You never do this again. You never do that again"....She was scared too. (Participant 23)

Moreover, participants agreed that the more one gets involved in gang activities,

the more likely one will engage in serious criminal activities. Participants further commented that they did not believe in the school's and the police's anti-gang propaganda. They felt that the school and police did not understand the lives of Chinese gang members at all:

You needed to know someone and [have] some connections [in selling stolen cars]. No gang; no connections. (Participant 21)

They [school] invited the police to come and talk about gang problems on the street....I don't think he [police officer] knew anything about Chinese gangs...They [the police] like to scare us. (Participant 1)

Most respondents found that family support was crucial in helping them deal with their experiences in the criminal justice system.

Contrary to popular belief, there were no initiation ceremonies for gang member recruitment. Participants "drifted into the gang." They joined gangs because their friends were gang members already, or because the gang could offer them protection:

I was pushed and given a punch by a white guy at school, XX came and beaten him up. XX told me that we [Chinese] should look out for each other. I knew that he was a gang member....I did not want to act like a jerk when someone was helping me. (Participant 31)

Support systems

The respondents' support system consisted of supports and resources provided by

family, friends, relatives, and social service practitioners or criminal justice professionals. Most respondents found that family support was crucial in helping them deal with their experiences in the criminal justice system:

They [the family] were upset [about the offence of assault]....Later they tried to come up with something to help. [During my suspension from school], my elder brother drove me to the uncle's garage every day. My uncle is a car mechanic. He promised to keep me around his garage until I returned to school. (Participant 1)

Most participants displayed behavioural problems while they were in junior high; nevertheless, they perceived that their school was not providing them with enough support. One research participant was involved in a fight with his classmate and was referred to an anger management class for therapy rather than addressing the root cause of the problem.

I don't need anger management. I was being picked on by the white [student]. I fought back. I fought back and I fought for respect. (Respondent 31)

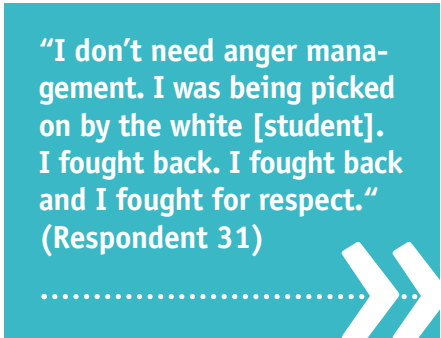
These youth's comments on probation services were positive, but not helpful. They commented that most probation officers were nice but did not understand Chinese gang culture and their immigrant backgrounds. Nonetheless, these young men suggested that the ethnic background of the social worker/counsellor is not a deciding factor when it comes to asking for help. Rather, it is the social worker/counsellor's caring attitude and understanding of immigrant youth that are key in the helping process.

I prefer counsellors from my cultural background...but what matters most is their caring attitude towards us....I don't mind if he is from another cultural background. (Participant 8)

Discussion and conclusion

Results from this research are consistent with findings from previous studies and have implications for formulating policy framework and developing service delivery models for Chinese immigrant youth in the criminal justice system.

“I don’t need anger management. I was being picked on by the white [student]. I fought back. I fought back and I fought for respect.”
 (Respondent 31)



The present study’s findings have corroborated the results of other studies on perceived blocked opportunities and criminal involvement. The acculturation stresses of being a visible minority and the feeling of being marginalized by mainstream institutions (e.g., school and law enforcement agencies) have rendered these Chinese immigrant youths less trusting and attached to society. This finding is consistent with the assumption of social control theory and the findings of Sheu’s study on Chinese youth gangs in New York City (Sheu, 1986). Other literature also supports the idea that when youth are facing multiple forms of social marginalization such as a lack of meaningful ties with family and friends, discrimination based on race/ethnicity, and/or the stigma of having been in conflict with the law, they are left with a sense of exclusion and pessimism about the future (Chettleburgh, 2007; Davies & Tanner, 2003).

Furthermore, the finding on criminal involvement supports the differential association theory. The data demonstrated that these youths’ first offense of these youths mostly

happened within a group context with other gang members. They gained a sense of belonging and protection, which they did not have otherwise. Nonetheless, it should be noted that other scholarly works also point out the irony of the victimization that comes from being a gang member; that is, members are often the target of other gangs. In a survey of high school students in Toronto, it found that youth who identify as being in a criminal gang report significantly greater levels of victimization (Wortley & Tanner, 2004).

Findings of the present study have implications for policy formulation at three levels of governments. Discrimination against ethnic immigrant youth should be addressed in all youth policy deliberations, at both federal and provincial levels. Recently, the *Report of Youth Violence in Ontario* acknowledged that discrimination against ethnic youth is systemic and structural in Canada (Government of Ontario, 2008). Discrimination is conducive to alienating the Chinese immigrant youth. Also, the Chinese culture of internalizing problems and immigrant parents’ inadequate knowledge of pertinent social services further exacerbate the problem. Therefore, public education across the province, designed to increase awareness and to acknowledge the systemic discrimination and marginalization against immigrant youths in public institutions, should be a priority in formulating a youth policy.

At the local level, municipalities should work with local police forces and school boards in addressing the challenges faced by Chinese immigrant youth. For example, as a preventive measure, more resources should be invested in immigrant youth to engage them at the junior high school level and to involve their parents in school administration and management. In addition, the local police force should be provided with culturally sensitive training to help in their day-to-day operations, and as a way to establish a dialogue and a working relationship with immigrant communities.

The acculturation stresses of being a visible minority and the feeling of being marginalized by mainstream institutions have rendered these Chinese immigrant youths less trusting and attached to society.



The findings of this study have implications for the social service delivery level as well. Families should be included for prevention and intervention initiatives. Consistent with other research findings (Wang, 1995; Wong, 2000), this study suggests that connections to family are very important to these youth, regardless of their level of crime involvement. Parental involvement and engagement in the helping process are critical in addressing the needs of immigrant youth in the criminal justice system. In fact, as suggested in this study, as well as in other studies, it was the parents who took the initiative of turning to mainstream organizations to seek outside help (Kwok, 2009). Social workers and criminal justice professionals should take this into consideration in their practice. In addition, data of the present study revealed that youth might turn to other at-risk youth for emotional support, could thereby be “drifting” toward gangs, and are more likely to commit their first offense with other gang members. As such, early intervention should be focusing on resisting peer pressure and demystify the gang culture. For example, these youth should be made aware of the irony of the victimization that comes from being a gang member, despite the feeling of being protected by this gang (Wortley & Tanner, 2004).

Moreover, the finding that ethnic backgrounds of social workers/counsellors are

not a determining factor in the helping process has significant implications for social work training in working with Chinese immigrant youth in conflict with the law. Training in cultural sensitivity and learning local Chinese gang cultures become imperative in working with this population. Such knowledge includes an understanding of the dynamics of different youth gangs in a local context and possible penalties that await those who attempt to leave the gang. Acquisition of this knowledge would not only help workers establish trust with Chinese immigrant youth and help them better understand what they have gone through, but also contribute to working out concrete plans for the youth.

Last but not least, in order to address this issue from a more holistic and inclusive perspective, advisory boards are proposed in response to local community needs. These advisory boards are similar to the local special governance bodies such as school boards, but focus on coordinating current services offered to immigrant youth in conflict with the law and providing consultations to service providers. The board could be comprised of members from schools, the judicial system, police, social services organizations, a university or professional body, and all relevant stakeholders in the community. For day-to-day operations and contact with local communities, these community advisory boards could hire multicultural liaison officers and link with schools, social service organizations, and academia that are interested and/or involved in working with immigrant youth in conflict with the law.

In terms of limitations, the findings of this study should be interpreted with caution as regards its generalizability to other cities. The context of Chinese communities in Toronto and Vancouver is different from those of other Canadian cities, where the Chinese communities are much smaller and benefit from fewer resources in support of immigrants.

References

- Alberta. Criminal Intelligence Service Canada. (2002). *Annual Report on Organized Crime in Canada, 2002*. Retrieved April 4, 2006, from <http://www.cisalberta.ca/ciscreport.htm>
- Bandura, A. (1977). *Social Learning Theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Bania, M. (2009). Gang violence among youth and young adults: (dis)affiliation and the potential for prevention. *IPC Review, 3*, 89–116.
- Burgess, E.W. (1925). The growth of the city. In R. E. Park, E. W. Burgess & R. D. McKenzie. *The City* (pp. 47–62). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Canada. Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada. (2003). *Results of the 2002 Canadian police survey on youth gangs*. Ottawa.
- Chettleburgh, M.C. (2007). *Young Thugs: Inside the Dangerous World of Canadian Street Gangs*. Toronto: Harper Collins Publishers.
- Chin, K.L. (1996). *Chinatown Gangs: Extortion, Enterprise, and Ethnicity*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Chow, Henry P.H. (2002). Police-community relations: Chinese attitudes toward the police in Toronto. *Canadian Ethnic Studies / Études ethniques au Canada, XXXIV*(2), 90–101.
- Davies, S., & Tanner, J. (2003). The long arm of the law: Effects of labelling on employment. *The Sociological Quarterly, 44*(3), 385–404.
- Doob, A.N., & Gartner, R. (2005, August 12). Aim at crime's cause. *Globe and Mail*, p. A13.
- Fischer, C. (1995). The Subcultural Theory of Urbanism: A Twentieth Year Assessment. *American Journal of Sociology, 101*(3), 543–577.
- Hirschi, T. (1969). *Causes of Delinquency*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Knox, G.W., McCurrie, T.F., Laskey, M.S., & Tromanhauser, E.D. (1996). The 1996 national law enforcement gang analysis survey: A research report from the National Gang Crime Research Center. *Journal of Gang Research, 3*(4), 41–55.
- Kwok, S.M. (2009). *Asian Youth in the Criminal Justice System in Canada*. Germany: VDM Verlag.
- . (2008). Experiences of Asian Youth in the Criminal Justice System of Canada, *Journal of Gang Research, 15*(3), 1–17.
- . (2000). Exploring the experiences of Chinese in drug treatment programs in Vancouver, Canada. *British Journal of Social Work, 30*(5), 663–672.
- Kwok, S.M., & Tam, D.M.Y. (2004). Delinquency of Asian Youth in Canada. *Asia Pacific Journal of Social Work & Development, 14*(2), 5–18.
- Martell, E.C. (2002). Vices from immigrant youth: perceptions of their involvement with the Canadian justice system (master's thesis, Wilfrid Laurier University, Canada).
- Moyer, S. (2005). *A comparison of case processing under the Young Offenders Act and the first six months of the Youth Criminal Justice Act*. Ottawa: Department of Justice Canada.
- Ontario. Commission on Systemic Racism in the Ontario Criminal Justice System. (1995). *Report of the Commission on Systemic Racism in the Ontario Criminal Justice System*. Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario.
- Ontario. Government of Ontario. (2008). *The Review of the Roots of Youth Violence*. Toronto, Ontario: Queen's Printer for Ontario.
- Pih, K.K.H., & Mao, K. (2005). "Gold parachutes" and gangbanging: Taiwanese gangs in suburban southern California. *Journal of Gang Research, 12*(4), 59–72.
- Rice, B. (1977). The new gangs of Chinatown. *Psychology Today, 10*, 60–69.
- Sheu, C.J. (1986). *Delinquency and identity: Juvenile delinquency in an American Chinatown*. New York: Harrow and Heston.
- Song, J.H.L. (1988). *No White feathered crowns: Chinese immigrants' and Vietnamese refugees' adaptation to American legal institution*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation: University of California, Irvine.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Sutherland, E.H., & Cressey, D.R. (1978). *Criminology* (10th ed.). New York: Lippincott.
- Tsunokai, G. T. (2005). Beyond the lenses of the "model" minority myth: A descriptive portrait of Asian gang members. *Journal of Gang Research, 12*(4), 37–58.
- Tsunokai, G., & Kposowa, A.J. (2002). Asian gangs in the United States: The current state of the research literature. *Crime, Law & Social Change, 37*, 37–50.

Wang, Z. (1995). Gang affiliation among Asian-American high school students: A path analysis of social development model. *Journal of Gang*, 2(3), 1–13.

———. (1996). Is the pattern of Asian gang affiliation different? A multiple regression analysis. *Journal of Crime and Justice*, 19, 113–128.

Wong, S.K. (2000). Acculturation and Chinese delinquency. In L. Driedger & S. S. Halli (Eds.), *Race and Racism: Canada's Challenge* (pp. 235–252). Montréal: McGill University Press.

Worthely, S., Tanner, J. (2004). Social groups or criminal organizations? The extent and nature of youth gang activity in Toronto. In B. Kidd & J. Phillips (Eds.), *From Enforcement and Prevention to Civic Engagement : Research on Community Safety* (pp. 59–80). Toronto: Centre of Criminology, University of Toronto.

Biographical notes

Siu-ming Kwok is an associate professor at the School of Social Work at King's University College, University of Western Ontario. His research interests include the crime and justice system, welfare policy and redistribution, immigrants and settlement.

Dora Tam is an associate professor at the School of Social Work at King's University College, University of Western Ontario. Dora's research interests include issues of violence against women among marginalized groups; diversity issues in social work practice and research; social work education and field education; and program evaluation.

Notes

- 1 Social disorganization theory suggests that high crime rates are linked to neighbourhood ecological characteristics. Youths from disadvantaged neighbourhoods were participants in a subculture in which delinquency was considered to be approved behavior (Burgess, 1925).
- 2 Social control theory proposes that when youth are more attached to mainstream social institutions (e.g., family, school, church) through socialization and the learning process, their inclination to indulge in anti-social behaviour is reduced (Hirschi, 1969).
- 3 Differential association theory suggests that peer negative influence is another strong predictor of delinquent behaviour apart from weak attachment to family and school (Sutherland & Cressey, 1978).
- 4 Social learning theory focuses on the learning that occurs within a social context. It considers that people learn from one another, including such concepts as observational learning, imitation, and modeling (Bandura, 1977).
- 5 Subcultural theory emerged from the work of the Chicago School on gangs and developed through the symbolic interactionism school into a set of theories arguing that certain groups or subcultures in society have values and attitudes that are conducive to crime and violence (Fischer, 1995).
- 6 The grounded theory approach is a qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived theory grounded on data in the field (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Wounds of the Gut, Wounds of the Soul

Youth Violence and Community Healing Among Oromos in Toronto

Martha Kuwee Kumsa

Abstract

In this article, I tell the story of a community-initiated and youth-led participatory action research project, which was designed and carried out in the Oromo community of Toronto against the disturbing backdrop of youth violence throughout the city. Although the authorial privilege of this article is given to me, this is a project where youth took ownership of the research and turned a community-initiated project into a youth-led initiative. In telling this story, I alternate between the “we” of the project and my individual voice. I discuss the overview of the findings, particularly highlighting the stories of three critical incidents and the role each played in galvanizing the community, in fragmenting the research team, and in facilitating a more profound understanding of the research findings. I also provide a brief overview of the youth healing project that emerged from the research findings. In the concluding section, I analyze implications for social work policy and practice in relation to broader public discourses surrounding the settlement and integration of newcomers in the era of glocalization, a term coined to describe the unique local effects of global processes.

Keywords: Youth violence • community healing • Oromo youth • Oromo-Canadian • participatory action research • glocalization

Background

In May 2005, a young Oromo man was charged with the murder of his Oromo wife, leaving their 2-year-old son virtually orphaned. Cast against Toronto’s escalating youth violence, the tragic news shocked the small Oromo community in Toronto. For many young Oromos and their families, who came to Canada fleeing violence and persecution in Ethiopia, this new tragedy caused them to relive past trauma. Many felt deeply vulnerable. But the murder was just a harbinger of what is waiting to happen. Some young Oromos make it in Canada, but others are experiencing disengagement

from schools, substance abuse, suicide, intergenerational conflicts, forced return to Ethiopia, homelessness, untreated trauma, teen parenthood, unemployment and involvement with the justice system.

Concern in the community mounted, as families grieved the adversities that befell their youth. The murder galvanized the community to do something about the predicament of its youth. The Oromo-Canadian Community Association (OCCA) conducted an informal needs assessment (OCCA-GTA, 2005) where elders named “youth-at-risk” as a major community concern and “youth skills training” as the focus of intervention. Despite repeated

calls, however, youth were not coming forward for skills training. The message was loud and clear: *nothing about us without us!*

The name Oromo became a synonym for violence and murder. In an atmosphere thickened with the sexually, racially, ethnically and nationally charged face of the Other, any association with the murderer became risky.

Findings

Alienation emerged as the overarching finding of our research and we identified it as the root of what embitters youth and drives them to violence. We identified five intimately interrelated threads of invisible violence that cut youth off from life-sustaining resources: a) the violence of dislocation and the ensuing alienation from the homeland and its socio-cultural resources; b) the violence of poverty and racism and the ensuing alienation from mainstream Canada and its multicultural global community; c) intergenerational violence and the ensuing alienation from families and communities; d) intra-generational violence and the ensuing alienation from peers; and e) intra-personal violence and the consequent alienation of youth from their own sense of self. All these cut deep wounds. Research participants named them “wounds of the gut,” “wounds of the soul.” To effect community healing and healthy integration of youth, we realized that our PAR must systematically address all five interwoven threads of alienation.

The transitional phase between research and action became a space of rigorous organizing, resource mobilization, strategic planning and action generation. Youth tapped into resources developed in other communities dealing with similar issues, both within and beyond Toronto. However, some of the hidden barriers youth experienced were unique to the Oromo community. Our findings pointed to two major gaps. The first was the general denial of traumatic pasts trailing youth, as families sought to swallow their own pain and focus on helping their people back home. As a result, youth walked around with unrecognized, undiagnosed and untreated trauma. Second, most Oromo families came to Toronto hoping that Canada would help them in democratizing Ethiopia and believing they would go home soon. Even as the hope of democratizing their homeland faded, however, strengthening the community in Toronto was seen as betraying that hope. As a result, youth experienced a loss of community and a deep sense of

The Project

The Participatory Action Research (PAR) project discussed in this article was initiated when elders realized the need for a participatory approach, in which youth identified their own needs and developed their own strategies of well-being. I was called in to facilitate the process because of my prior research experience with youth-at-risk. Enlisted youth researchers formed the Research Team (RT) along with two Research Advisory Committees—Youth-RAC and Elder-RAC. After refining our conceptual and methodological tools in a series of intense consultation workshops, we adopted the empowerment approach where research became a tool for redressing injustice (Freire 2003; Dullea, 2006; Kennedy, 1996; Lather, 1991; Park, 1993). Youth took ownership and turned the proposed needs assessment into a youth-led project searching for talents rather than deficits. To get to the bottom of what embitters and drives youth to violence, we explored what youth are passionate about and what they are good at. Fired up by the hope of turning things around, youth participated with enthusiasm.

alienation. Youth researchers took the opportunity this project presented to develop creative strategies to address these gaps. Now in its final year, the five-year PAR has observed many achievements and setbacks, but three critical incidents particularly sharpened and deepened our findings.

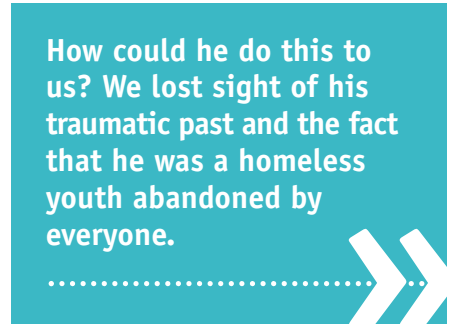
Critical incidents

In May 2006, exactly a year after the first murder, another tragedy hit us when another young Oromo was charged with the murder of his intimate partner, a young Canadian woman. We lost another life even as we were working hard to prevent just such a tragedy. In this double jeopardy, we also lost to prison the life of a traumatized young man who desperately needed healing. Worse still, he was a participant in our project. Images of a devilish young Oromo murderer with a head full of dreadlocks peered back at us from TV screens, side by side with the beautiful young white Canadian woman whose life was cut short. The name Oromo became a synonym for violence and murder. In an atmosphere thickened with the sexually, racially, ethnically and nationally charged face of the Other, any association with the murderer became risky. Many Oromos responded by distancing themselves from the murderer and denying any relation. The shock and disbelief turned into rage—rage at the young Oromo charged with murder. He was a disgrace to his people.

The rage in the community echoed through our project. We felt betrayed by the young participant who did just what we were trying to prevent. It was an attack on us, and on our efforts. How could he do this to us? We lost sight of his traumatic past and the fact that he was a homeless youth abandoned by everyone. He became an evil offender. This rigid victim/offender binary made it extremely hard for some of us to feel the pain of the victim’s family and to grieve the loss of the young Canadian woman and support the healing of the traumatized young Oromo offender at the same time. To add

insult to injury, our research coordinator was locked up for petty crime. It was heartbreaking to see such youthful energy disappear into the prison system. Although he told us he was innocent, his imprisonment cast ominous shadows and we felt he was guilty. We felt that he, too, betrayed us in doing just what we were trying to prevent. He was an offender. Breaking the victim/offender binary and showing the inseparable relationship between agency and victimization was beyond our reach.

How could he do this to us? We lost sight of his traumatic past and the fact that he was a homeless youth abandoned by everyone.




As the project struggled on, yet another tragedy struck when a young Oromo died alone, quietly. Police ruled out both homicide and suicide. Doctors couldn’t explain his sudden death. How could a healthy young man just drop and die? Police were looking for physical violence; doctors were looking for medial causes. The young man’s body showed neither. We were deeply shaken and baffled. Where was the violence here? Who was to blame for the loss of this life? Who was the victim? Who was the offender? With this blurring of the victim/offender dualism, a more profound understanding of violence set in and we moved from blame to responsibility. If the first tragedy galvanized the community and the second one fragmented us deeply, with this quiet death, everything fell into place for our team. The interconnectedness of all forms of violence became visible to us, ironically, through the very invisibility of this quiet form of violence.

Imbued with deeper meanings, violence became signified as any form of injustice,

oppression, or discrimination (Freire, 2003) inherent in everyday practice of power (Ahmed, 2000; Bourdieu, 2001; Foucault, 1982; Chambon, 1999). We found that such sociality and ordinary violence is intimately bound up with people’s sense of self and their strategies of well-being (Adelson, 2000; Das, Klienman, Lock, Ramphele & Reynolds, 2001). We understood not only the suffering violence produces but also the human possibilities it simultaneously engenders. Everyday experience of violence is inseparably entwined with subtle means and tacit strategies by which youth subvert, contest, and appropriate violence to facilitate their own healing. We thus came to understand violence and healing as intimately intertwined relational processes of Self and Other, inherent in everyday living.

The everyday experience of violence is inseparably entwined with subtle means and tacit strategies by which youth subvert, contest, and appropriate violence to facilitate their own healing.



Youth healing

Likewise, in Heal and Connect (HAC), the action phase of our project, we experienced healing as a multilayered process of ongoing construction and reconstruction of Self to soothe the wounds of everyday violence. In participants’ experiences of settlement and integration, healing is an inseparable twin of making sense of Self and Others, and of developing an identity in relation to Others. Healing involves not only mending from physical injury; it also requires mending from the violation of

personhood and hurt Self. Healing is the mending of inequities, injustices and asymmetrical power relations. Invigorated by this sense of community healing, we organized the Oromo Coalition against Youth Alienation (OCAYA) to develop and facilitate HAC programs.

The Coalition developed Heal and Connect into multilayered programs, to address alienation and to connect youth to the multiple spaces of affinity they identified. These programs were organized around the five threads of our findings. First, youth benefit from homework support and mentoring relationships designed to connect them to their career goals and aspirations, and thus to their sense of identity. Second, youth participate in soccer and basketball tournaments designed to connect them to their peers within and beyond the Oromo community. Third, youth engage their families and community elders by organizing cultural and recognition events to tap into relevant ancestral heritage on their own terms. Fourth, youth weave themselves into the Canadian fabric and broader global community by highlighting their reality of poverty and racism through theatre and video. Fifth, youth participate in transnational Oromo conventions to connect with other Oromos back home and around the world.

As running all these programs posed a monumental challenge, the Coalition mobilized human and material resources. The Coalition received its most significant funding from the Youth Challenge Fund (YCF), the fund the Government of Ontario made available for tackling province-wide youth violence. The fund particularly targeted Black youth as the most marginalized of the marginalized, and the Coalition received close to \$100,000. This grant marked a turning point in spurring the Coalition into a youth-only space and the project into a youth-led initiative, thus displacing elders and centering and empowering youth.

Settlement and integration in the era of glocalization

By addressing youth violence and connecting youth to multiple places of affinity locally and globally, the five-threaded Heal and Connect programs present far-reaching policy and practice implications for the settlement and integration of newcomers in the era of glocalization. Glocalization signifies the mutual constitution and mutual transformation of global and local processes (Bauman, 1998; Robertson, 1995). Glocal reciprocity is deeply ingrained in the mutual transformation of youth violence and community healing. Placed at the cutting edge of local and global transformation, social work needs to tap into these creative resources. Our challenge, however, lies in developing an understanding that the settlement of newcomers requires shaking up and unsettling our settled ideas and beliefs about settlement and integration (Ilcan, 2002).

Healing involves not only mending from physical injury; it also requires mending from the violation of personhood and hurt Self. Healing is the mending of inequities, injustices and asymmetrical power relations.

Indeed, our findings are validated by other studies (Reitz & Banerjee, 2007), although the mutual transformation of violence and healing in everyday life seems to be lost. For example, in a high-level Government of Ontario comprehensive review, McMurtry & Curling (2008) locate the roots of youth violence in broader structural marginalization and

alienation. Their recommendations also mirror and validate Heal and Connect projects. However, beyond identifying poverty and racism as risk factors, they do not name them as constituting everyday violence in and of themselves. I argue that losing sight of the ordinariness of violence confines policy to the extraordinary spheres. For policy makers to understand the extraordinary and to develop effective violence prevention policies, they need to understand the extraordinary as inseparably intertwined with the ordinary. Moreover, the review does not address the intimate interconnectedness of violence and healing. I argue again that without an understanding of such an intimate relationship, policy is rendered blind to community healing.

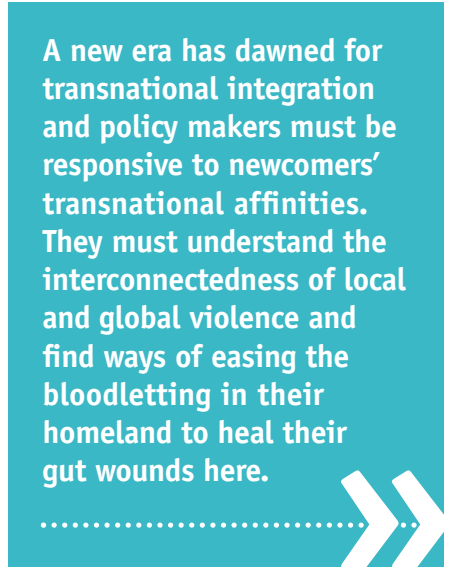
In connecting Oromo youth to spaces of multiple transnational affinities (Gow, 2002), Heal and Connect programs question the confinement of integration policy within the Canadian national boundary. Policy needs to reflect the transformation of the nation-state in the contemporary unprecedented global flow of people. In a current conversation on cosmopolitanism, Beck and Sznaider (2010) lament that methodological nationalism is preventing social theorists from thinking beyond their national borders. What they mean is that scholars equate society to nation-state when they must open up research to broader methodological horizons. Commending them for their insights, Glick Schiller (2010) and Soysal (2010) also take them to task on their blindness to issues of power. I concur and argue that Canadian integration policy must break out of its methodological nationalism, but it must do so with equity and justice. A new era has dawned for transnational integration and policy makers must be responsive to newcomers' transnational affinities. They must understand the interconnectedness of local and global violence and find ways of easing the bloodletting in their homeland to heal their gut wounds here. The challenge in the era of glocalization is to find creative ways of riding the tension between nationalism and transnationalism.

Our Heal and Connect programs also contest the individual/community dualism that plagues the Canadian public policy of multiculturalism at the federal level. Abu-Laban (1998) observes that Canadian immigration policy is deeply polarized between integration and multiculturalism. On the integration side, Bisoondath (1994) argues that multiculturalism should be scrapped because it is divisive. The only way out of multicultural ghettos, he asserts, is through individual integration. On the contrary, Kymlicka (1998) argues that multiculturalism offers equal rights and respect for community belonging. Integration is defined as a two-way process where both newcomers and the society adjust to one another (CIC, 2001; Dewing & Leman, 2006; Fleras & Kunz, 2001). Although integration breaks the assimilation/segregation dualism, its two-way process re-inscribes the society/newcomer dualism by equating society to the nation-state. Canada's integration policy must acknowledge that society is much wider than the nation-state for newcomers. It must break the dualism and facilitate multiple layers of integration. Our programs provide examples of multiple spaces of healing and belonging in which individual and collective aspirations are intimately intertwined.

We don't have to go far to demonstrate the dire consequences of such dualism in integration policy. The violence that ravaged Oromo youth is policy dualism playing out in the delivery of social services. Matsuoka & Sorenson (1991) advise that people from Ethiopia should not be considered homogenous and that internal political and ethnic struggles must be considered in order to deliver social services effectively. In her study with African newcomers, however, George (2002) argues that individual newcomer's needs must be taken as fundamental criteria for the delivery of settlement services. I contend that such policy polarity within social work contributes to the sad reality of youth alienation. Youth experience profound loss of community, because individual integration dismisses the need for community belonging, thus marginalizing

ethno-specific communities. Meagre funding for social services goes either to country-based agencies like those in the Ethiopian community where Oromo youth face politicized hostility, or it goes to mainstream agencies, where they feel marginalized.

A new era has dawned for transnational integration and policy makers must be responsive to newcomers' transnational affinities. They must understand the interconnectedness of local and global violence and find ways of easing the bloodletting in their homeland to heal their gut wounds here.



Social workers must recognize that the challenges facing newcomers today are more complex than ever before. They must be creative in expanding spaces of healing for youth, by tapping into community development resources (e.g., Kudva & Driskell, 2009; Lions Circle, 2005; McGinnis et al., 2007; McMurtry & Curling, 2008; Sánchez, 2009; Youth Action Network, 2002; 2005). Social work too must overcome its methodological nationalism and break its policy dualism to reflect the realities of newcomers and facilitate transnational community development. Our research demonstrates the catastrophic impacts of dichotomizing newcomers' needs. We must acknowledge that, as human beings, we need to nurture both our unique individualities and our unique collectivities, because we are unique even in our collectivities.

Acknowledgements

I heartily thank the youth and community elders who granted me the authorial privilege in this participatory action research project. The project was funded by the Government of Ontario's Youth Challenge Fund (YCF) and by Wilfrid Laurier University's Short Term Research Grant, made available by the Community-University Research Alliance (CURA) fund of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). I would like to extend my gratitude to both institutions for their financial support.

References

- Abu-Laban, Y. (1998). Welcome/STAY OUT: The contradiction of Canadian integration and immigration policies at the Millennium. *Canadian Ethnic Studies / Études ethniques au Canada*, XXX(3), 190–211.
- Adelson, N. (2000). Re-imagining Aboriginality: An Indigenous people's response to social suffering. *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 37(1), 11–34.
- Ahmed, S. (2000). *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Anisef, P. & Kilbride, K.M. (Eds.). (2003). *Managing Two Worlds: The Experiences and Concerns of Immigrant Youth in Ontario*, Toronto: Canadian Scholar's Press.
- Bauman, Z. (1998). On glocalization: Or globalization for some, localization for some others. *Thesis Eleven*, 54, 37–49.
- Beck, U. & Sznaider, N. (2010). Unpacking cosmopolitanism for the social sciences: A research agenda. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 61(s1), 381–403.
- Bisoondath, N. (1994). *Selling Illusion: The Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada*. Toronto: Penguin Books.
- Bourdieu, P. (2001). *Masculine Domination* (Richard Nice, trans.). Cambridge, U.K.: Polity.
- Caglar, A.S. (1997). Hyphenated identities and limits of "culture." In T. Modood & P. Werbner (Eds.), *The Politics of Multiculturalism in New Europe: Racism, Identity and Community* (pp. 169–185). London and New York: Zed Books.
- Canada. Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), Integration Branch. (2001). *Immigrant integration in Canada: Policy objectives, program delivery and challenges*. Retrieved on January 12, 2010 from <http://atwork.settlement.org>.
- Chambon, A. S. (1999). "A Foucauldian approach": Making the familiar visible. In A.S. Chambon, A.I., & L. Epstein (Eds.), *Reading Foucault for Social Work* (pp. 51–81). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Das, V., Klienman, A., Lock, M., Ramphel, M., & Reynolds, P. (Eds.). (2001). *Re-Making a World: Violence, Social Suffering, and Recovery*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Dewing, M. & Leman, M. (2006). *Canadian Multiculturalism*. Ottawa: Parliamentary Information and Research Service.
- Dullea, K. (2006, January). Women shaping participatory research to their own needs. *Community Development Journal*, 41(1), 65–74.
- Fleras, A. & Kunz, J.L. (2001). *Media and Minorities: Representing Diversity in a Multicultural Canada*. Canada: Thompson Education Publishing.
- Foucault, M. (1982). The subject and power. In H.L. Dreyfus & P. Robinow (Eds.), *Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (pp. 208–226). Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Freire, P. (2003). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (M.B. Ramos, trans.). New York: Continuum.
- George, U. (2002). A needs-based model for settlement service delivery for newcomers to Canada. *International Social Work*, 45(4), 465–480.
- Glick Schiller, N. (2010). Old Baggage and Missing Language: A Commentary on Beck and Sznaider's "Unpacking Cosmopolitanism: A Research Agenda." *British Journal of Sociology*, 61(s1) 413–420.
- Gow, G. (2002). *The Oromo in Exile: From the Horn of Africa to the Suburbs of Australia*. Melbourne, Australia: Melbourne University Press.
- Ilcan, S. (2002). *The Longing in Belonging*. Westport: Praeger.
- Kennedy, M. (1996). *Transformative community planning: Empowerment through community development*. Retrieved September 30, 2004 from <http://www.plannersnetwork.org>
- Kudva, N. & Driskell, D. (2009). Creating space for participation: The role of organizational practice in structuring youth participation. *Community Development*, 40(4), 367–380.
- Kymlicka, W. (1998). *Finding Our Way: Rethinking Ethnocultural Relations in Canada*. Don Mills, Canada: Oxford University Press.
- Lather, P. (1991). *Getting Smart: Feminist Research and Pedagogy*. New York: Routledge.

Lions Circle. (2005). African Canadian Men's Association. Toronto. The Lions Circle.com.

Matsuoka, A. & Sorenson, J. (1991). Ethnic identity and social service delivery: Some models examined in relation to immigrants and refugees from Ethiopia. *Canadian Social Work Review / Revue canadienne de service social*, 8 (2), 255–268.

McGinnis, T., Goodstein-Stolzenberg, A., & Costa Saliani, E. (2007). "Indnpride": Online spaces of transnational youth as sites of creative and sophisticated literacy and identity work. *Linguistics and Education*, 18, 283–304.

McMurtry, R. & Curling, A. (2008). *The Review of the Roots of youth Violence*. Toronto, Canada: Queen's Printer for Ontario.

Oromo-Canadian Community Association of Greater Toronto Area. (2005). *Report of the Executive Director*. OCCA-GTA.

Park, P., Brydon-Miller, M. Hall, B. Jackson, T. (Eds.). (1993). *Voices of Change: Participatory Research in the United States and Canada*. London: Bergin & Garvey.

Reitz, J.G. & Banerjee, R. (2007). Racial inequality, social cohesion, and policy issues in Canada. In K. Banting, T. J. Courchene, & F. L. Seidle (Eds.) *Belonging? Diversity, Recognition and Shared Citizenship in Canada* (pp. 489–545). Montréal: Institute for Research on Public Policy.

Robertson, R. (1995). Glocalization: Time-space and homogeneity-heterogeneity. In M. Featherstone, S. Lash, & R. Robertson (Eds.). *Global Modernities* (pp. 25–44). London: Thousand Oaks; New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Sánchez, P. (2009). Chicana feminist strategies in a participatory action research project with transnational Latina youth. *New Directions for Youth Development*, No. 123, 83–97.

Sassen, S. (2010). New Frontiers Facing Urban Sociology at the Millennium. *British Journal of Sociology*, 61(s1), 143–158.

Soysal, Y.N. (2010). Unpacking Cosmopolitanism: An Insider-Outsider's Reading. *British Journal of Sociology*, 61(s1), 405–411.

Youth Action Network. (2002). *Fire it up: A tool kit for youth action*. Resource Action Centre, Toronto.

———. (2005). *Keep it real. A media literacy manual: Bringing hip hop into the classroom*. Resource Action Centre, Toronto.

Biographical notes

Martha Kuwee Kumsa is an Oromo, born and raised in Ethiopia. She came to Canada as a refugee with the help of PEN and Amnesty International. She is now a Canadian citizen, teaching at the Faculty of Social Work, Wilfrid Laurier University.

A Social Worker's Role in Recognizing Prior Learning (RPL) as a Mechanism to Help Strengthen the Labour Supply

Alicia Sutton

Abstract

This article focuses on the problems facing newcomers to Canada who struggle to obtain professional recognition in their chosen occupations. The barriers faced by these individuals can be addressed through the concept of Recognizing Prior Learning (RPL).

Keywords: Recognizing prior learning • strengthening the labour market supply • social worker support for newcomers

When immigrants or refugees flee their country of origin to ensure their personal safety, they are often unable to retrieve the vital certificates and documents that verify their education and training. Typical scenarios include a 35-year-old woman with three university degrees, including an M.A., plus ten years of teaching experience in her own country, being unable to secure teaching employment in Canada; or a foreign-born dental surgeon, whose skills would ordinarily be in high demand, forced to drive a taxi to support his family. In both cases, the credentials and qualifications of professionals educated in other countries are not recognized in Canada. The other two groups most affected are people with skills gained through work or non-formal training, and transferees between post-secondary institutions or between provinces (Bloom & Grant, 2001).

These individuals are victims of a labour market that is unable to acknowledge their skills and abilities. It is unfortunate that common ground cannot be found for assessing the credentials of displaced professionals, especially in our increasingly globalized, high-

tech, well-connected world. These workers have the skills, experience and abilities to fill some necessary social niches; their only lack is the written qualifications or certifications to demonstrate their abilities. As the Conference Board of Canada has stated, without the appropriate recognition of their abilities, many highly skilled people remain unemployed or underemployed (Government of Saskatchewan, 2009). To help solve this problem, there are many opportunities to create a revised model of qualification recognition, which may involve all levels of society: from social workers up to training institutions, community-based organizations, unions, industry associations, employers and government.

Explanation of RPL

The barriers faced by these individuals can be addressed by the Recognizing Prior Learning (RPL) program—an umbrella concept that encompasses Foreign Credential Recognition, Credit Transfer (CT), and Prior Learning and Assessment Recognition (PLAR). These

concepts capture formal, informal, and non-formal learning and experience (Government of Saskatchewan, 2009). As the name suggests, RPL focuses on past experience, and provides various mechanisms to both motivate learners to upgrade their skills, and to assess existing abilities so that people can receive appropriate recognition for them.

RPL would not result in a carpenter being assessed and fast-tracked to becoming a brain surgeon.

The concept of RPL has been in existence for over thirty years (Morrissey & Myers, 2008), with advocates experimenting with assessment methods, empowering adult learners, and supporting marginalized workers in their transition to the labour market. So far, formal training institutions, governments, and some regulated professions have hesitated to embrace RPL. However, the current circumstances in the labour market, through the combination of scenarios described above, will likely become a significant driver for change. By continuing to ignore marginalized groups, we are missing a valuable opportunity to strengthen the labour market by supporting newcomers.

Before gap education and training is undertaken, or new employment is secured, a critical step is to find out what workplace competencies and skills newcomer adults have (Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment, 2007). RPL would not result in a carpenter being assessed and fast-tracked to becoming a brain surgeon. Yet often such misunderstandings may cause hesitation among employers, many of whom do not realize how RPL assessment and credentialing operate. These are based on past and current experience, and on comparison with agreed-upon and

measurable outcomes; they must be verified by evidence or validated by others; and must demonstrate actual learning, rather than just the recounting of experiences (Mitchell, Chappell, Bateman & Roy, 2005).

Economic background

Even though much of the country is still suffering the effects of an economic slump, there are indicators that Canada is turning a corner and beginning to rebound. However, a shortage of labour is anticipated, due both to a declining birth rate and the imminent retirement of the demographic wave of baby-boomers. Most other developed countries are experiencing a similar phenomenon. For many years now, Canada has been shaping its immigration agenda to bring in skilled workers. Unfortunately, in order for immigration to counteract the birthrate deficit, this country would need 3.5 million immigrants every year. They would also need to come from a younger cohort: the average age of newcomers is currently 46 (Varga-Toth & Mason-Singer, 2006). While immigration strategies are one element of the solution for strengthening population growth, they cannot be the only answer.

Canadian industry is already expressing concern about worker shortages, and government is trying to respond through a variety of initiatives: these include not just immigration, but also Labour Mobility compacts, funds to support unemployed workers through Labour Market Development Agreements, and Pan-Canadian Frameworks for Foreign Credential Recognition. Despite these strategies, there has been very little discussion about RPL. These problems, if addressed, can be converted into opportunities to help solve some of the country's labour supply issues. RPL can be utilized as a mechanism to help strengthen the labour supply.

Rationale for RPL

Learning has many types of value, to individuals, to households and families, and to society.

It has personal economic value in that it helps people to earn; it has emotional value in that it reduces stress, increases contentment, and promotes feelings of personal development; and it has an overall value to the economy, since as people earn more, they also tend to spend more (Bloom & Grant, 2001). The Conference Board suggests that if the problem of unrecognized skills could be eliminated, there would be an annual increase of some \$4.1–\$5.9 billion in personal income (Bloom & Grant, 2001). Many employees end up forgoing personal earning because there is a gap between the amount of their learning that is recognized and rewarded through work, and the amount that potentially could be recognized and rewarded (Bloom & Grant, 2001). Merely from the perspective of economic contribution, it seems worthwhile to address the problems of those who are struggling to get their credentials and experience recognized. The numbers are significant: a 2001 survey by the Conference Board revealed that there were over 350,000 unrecognized learners in Canada, aged 30–49. If all age groups are considered, this number increases to some 550,000 (Bloom & Grant, 2001)—a figure greater than the population of Newfoundland and Labrador.

RPL's target groups

If these individuals were able to get their competencies assessed and credentials recognized, it could mean a gain of between 33,000 and 83,000 skilled workers (Bloom & Grant, 2001). Community-based organizations that assist new Canadians often support skilled professionals in their search to relocate and practice. This support can involve connecting them with the regulatory bodies of their fields, which are well prepared to assess newcomers in high-demand professions such as nursing. In other professions, however, ones that are just beginning to feel the labour crunch, there is also the dilemma of establishing the responsibility for regulating assessment processes to ensure fair and equitable treatment for all who seek

entry. Depending on province or territory, some systems are now disconnected. Other skilled immigrants report delays in receiving confirmation of their permission to practice, which are often tied to their ESL competencies. Gaining accreditation in Canada can mean dealing with up to four entities, including post-secondary institutions, provincial governments, professional self-regulating bodies, and employers. This means that assessments might be made on imperfect information, and without standardized methods of evaluation (Bloom & Grant, 2001).

The Conference Board suggests that if the problem of unrecognized skills could be eliminated, there would be an annual increase of some \$4.1–\$5.9 billion in personal income.

RPL may create opportunities for people whose skills do not yet meet the guidelines of some occupations. Rather than just informing workers that they are not suitable candidates for employment, training services could be put in place to bridge the “knowledge gap,” and to start individuals on the path to acquiring the skills and training necessary to allow them to enter their chosen occupation. Such approaches have been adopted by Aboriginal communities for developing Access Programs in nursing, social work, and education.

Solving RPL's complexity

In most provinces, there is little acceptance of the problem, and still less any agreed-upon recognition process—though several, such as Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba,

can be considered leaders in specific aspects of RPL. Still, few have any official body with a mandate to find solutions, whether for foreigners or locals; or even to assess whether the problem relates most to credentials, qualifications, or experience. This prevents RPL from being maximized. For example, in Newfoundland and Labrador, several entities have policies developed on PLAR; however, most of these are only pilot projects, or are only able to consider prior learning within fairly narrow circumstances.

Rather than just informing workers that they are not suitable candidates for employment, training services could be put in place to bridge the “knowledge gap.”

It has been suggested that there is little evidence that recognizing foreign qualifications is an issue for regulated occupations in small jurisdictions like Newfoundland and Labrador (Foreign Qualification Recognition Subgroup, 2009). However, this needs to be verified by newcomer workers tangled in bureaucracy while waiting to get their qualifications recognized. Since their best resource and support is often the social workers assigned to their case while they remain in workplace limbo, it is important that the latter become aware of this issue¹.

There is hope for newcomer workers, though: the federal Forum of Labour Market Ministers has recently completed a pan-Canadian framework for assessing and recognizing foreign qualifications. The framework identifies fourteen target occupations, including architects, engineers, financial auditors and accountants, medical laboratory technologists, occupational

therapists, pharmacists, physiotherapists, registered nurses, dentists, engineering technicians, practical nurses, medical radiation technologists, physicians, K-12 teachers, and skilled trades (Forum of Labour Market Ministers, 2009). While this framework provides guidance, each province and territory then needs to develop its own local responses—following the guidelines of being fair, timely, transparent, and consistent.

Post-secondary institutions sometimes try to compartmentalize prior learning and experience into predetermined learning outcomes. However, this is complicated by the fact that education and training is a provincial or territorial responsibility in Canada, thus creating 13 different systems and preventing national cohesion (Foreign Qualification Recognition Subgroup, 2009). There is also a perception among institutions that conducting such assessments, and giving credit for prior learning, will somehow lower their standards (Government of Saskatchewan, 2009), thereby decreasing the number of students and affecting revenue. In fact, the opposite may be true: recognizing prior learning and experience may make universities more appealing to adult learners, since they offer the potential of embarking on bridging programs and learning.

With respect to industry, many professions and occupations are self-regulating, exercising monopoly over who gets in and stays in. Some professional associations are closed clubs, which use licensing to restrict entry into the profession—thereby raising the compensation of those already in the field (Grady, 2007). There are over 500 regulatory bodies for various industries in Canada, yet few are inclined to take on recognition work: many are fee-based, and lack the resources to engage in RPL work (Foreign Qualification Recognition Subgroup, 2009). Linked to this reluctance is the fear of “dumbing down” occupations, which could result in lower work standards and perhaps even affect public safety. Such myths can likely only be dispelled from within

the professions, and may only be achieved by demonstrating tried and tested assessment tools. The fact that each province and territory has the right to adopt its own appropriate occupational standards (Foreign Qualification Recognition Subgroup, 2009) also poses a challenge.

The advantage of developing an effective RPL strategy now, rather than later, is that regions can be better prepared if the labour market worsens in the coming years.



- Employers lack awareness and acceptance of recognizing skills acquired in ways other than the traditional post-secondary credentials (Bloom & Grant, 2001).

To solve this problem, some options that may be considered include the development of:

- new policies, provincial strategies and programs;
- structural and institutional reforms, and legislative changes;
- incentives for institutions and employers;
- new techniques, tools and structures for assessment;
- ways to determine core competencies within various occupations;
- initiatives to improve transfer mechanisms among institutions.

Solutions

There are several layers of obstacles to overcome in order to tap into the under-utilized potential of this section of the labour market. Some preconceived ideas that must be challenged are outlined below.

- Credential-awarding organizations are uncertain about the quality of learning gained at other institutions.
- Employers have varying opinions on the value of learning gained in non-traditional learning environments (since they generally take credentials as proxies for actual capacity).
- Institutions hesitate to alter their policies and/or shorten learning programs, since these moves might affect their economic survival.
- Licensing bodies are perceived as focusing only on maintaining professional standards, and consumer protection and public safety.

Some jurisdictions, such as Saskatchewan, have developed a policy framework on RPL (Government of Saskatchewan, 2009). Nova Scotia signed the Halifax Declaration for the Recognition of Prior Learning in 2001, representing a consensus on the issue and a set of principles for future development (Halifax Declaration, 2001). Other regions have varying levels of credential and qualification-recognition activities. The advantage of developing an effective RPL strategy now, rather than later, is that regions can be better prepared if the labour market worsens in the coming years.

Individual social workers may be able to take the lead in terms lobbying for further research, and in advocating and encouraging individual workers to identify their personal strengths, abilities, and career goals (Government of Saskatchewan, 2009). Those working with newcomers should educate themselves on the community resources available to under-employed people, and encourage them to get in touch with community-based organizations

that offer PLAR as a planning tool. It is also vital that social workers help to mobilize their own associations to communicate opportunities, define competencies, and explore ways to measure professional skills. Each provincial social work association could begin the process of outlining competencies that foreign-trained social workers could use to transfer to another jurisdiction; and these competencies can be benchmarked against standards established elsewhere, and assessment tools developed to measure the requirements of practice (Government of Saskatchewan, 2009).

Associations could also unite with other associations in problem-solving sessions with various stakeholders: learning institutions, employers, governments, and community-based organizations. This activity could create a collective momentum for developing solutions to RPL problems, highlighting the magnitude of the issue of unrecognized learning, and encouraging elected representatives to develop solutions. The literature suggests that these solutions most likely lie with individual provinces and jurisdictions.

References

- Bloom, M. & Grant, M. (2001). *Brain gain: The economic benefits of recognizing learning and learning credentials in Canada*. Conference Board of Canada 323-01 Detailed Findings.
- Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment. (2007). *Summary report: Feasibility of developing a national framework/model to assess immigrant learning*.
- Foreign Qualifications Recognition Subgroup. (2009). *Implementation Pathways*. Office of Immigration and Multiculturalism, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador.
- Forum of Labour Market Ministers. (2009). *A Pan-Canadian Framework for the Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications*. Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada. Retrieved January 19, 2010 from http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/workplace_skills/publications/fcr/opcf_folder/section
- Grady, P. (2007). *Survey of research on interprovincial labour mobility and the economic cost of barriers*. Industry Canada. Retrieved February 7, 2010 from <http://site.ebrary.com/lib>
- Halifax Declaration for the Recognition of Prior Learning. Retrieved January 19, 2010, from www.placecentre.ns.ca/conference/eocnf-page6.html
- Mitchell, J., Chappell, C., Bateman, A. & Roy, S. (2005). *Critical issues: A draft literature review on critical issues in teaching, learning and assessment in vocational education and training*. Retrieved February 27, 2010 from www.consortiumresearchprograms.net.au
- Morrissey, M., & Myers, D. (2008). *Achieving our Potential: An Action Plan for Prior Learning Assessments and Recognition in Canada*. Halifax: PLA Centre.
- Saskatchewan. Government of Saskatchewan. (2009). *Recognizing Prior Learning in Saskatchewan Provincial Policy Framework*. Retrieved January 29, 2010 from <http://www.aeel.gov.sk.ca/rpl>
- Varga-Toth, J., & Mason-Singer, S. (2006). Labour Pains. *The Hill Times* (September).

Biographical notes

Alicia Sutton is a registered social worker in Newfoundland and Labrador. Currently employed as the director of Policy, Planning and Evaluation with Human Resources, Labour and Employment (HRLE) at the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, she has practised throughout Canada and in the United Kingdom. This article arose from research completed as part of the master's program in Education, Leadership & Administration at Memorial University of Newfoundland.

Note

- ¹ Information can be obtained by visiting <http://www.capla.ca>; <http://www.naric.org.uk>; <http://www.priorlearning.ca>; http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/workplaceskills/credential_recognition/index; or <http://www.actionplan.gc.ca/initiatives/eng/index>.

Approaches to Portfolio Development and Applications for Immigrants in a Social Work Context

Stephen J. Sutherland • Dianne Conrad • Mark S. Wheller • Tej Wadhwa

Abstract

Newcomers to Canada face significant challenges in their attempt to settle in a new home and integrate into Canadian society. One of the most difficult tasks for Canada's newcomers is the search for employment and, prior to that or concurrently, obtaining the skills necessary to gain meaningful employment. Social workers who assist newcomers on this difficult path must help them to develop strategies for building self-confidence, skills for self-marketing and effective plans for learning how to make the transition to a career in Canada. This article outlines some important work being done in Canada to facilitate recognition of prior learning (RPL) in order to move newcomers more quickly through skills upgrading and into the workforce. The RPL portfolio process allows for the development of client "profiles" that can facilitate skilled immigrants' rapid movement toward meaningful employment by means of postsecondary education and training or by self-marketing through enhanced self-understanding and self-confidence.

Keywords: Portfolio • recognition of prior learning • prior learning assessment • foreign credential recognition • RPL • PLAR • FCR

The recognition of prior learning is practiced globally as a means of honouring and building on mature learners' past experiential learning. Grounded in ancient philosophies, the recognition of prior learning is defined as "the formal acknowledgement of skills, knowledge and competencies that are gained through work experience, informal training and life experience" (Vlăsceanu, Grünberg & Pârlea, 2004). Recognition of prior learning exists around the world in a variety of forms, for a variety of purposes and with many names. This article will refer to the recognition of prior learning as RPL.¹

It is well documented that changes to Canadian immigration and integration policies

have led to an increase in the number of economic and skilled immigrants (Schmidtke, Kovacev & Mary, 2006). However, organizational practices continue to systematically exclude immigrants from entry and access to their professions and trades (Alboim, Finnie & Meng, 2005). Using RPL to integrate immigrant professionals is key to Canada's economy as the Canadian labour shortage in Canada deepens (Bloom, 2008; CMEC, 2007). While the recent global recession has increased unemployment rates in the short term, this country's long-term prospects remain unchanged (McNiven & Foster, 2009) and immigration is an important part of the solution to this ongoing labour problem.

Although there are many ways in which informal and experiential learning can be demonstrated (interview, performance, etc.), the portfolio method—wherein learning is demonstrated using a compilation of “artifacts,” or types of structured documents prepared by learners—forms the basis for this article’s examples. Portfolios are used both by immigrant serving agencies and postsecondary institutions. Portfolios, appreciated for their academic approach and the flexibility afforded both learners and assessors, clearly identify and demonstrate learners’ skills and knowledge.

This article will discuss the RPL concept, provide examples of its current application with immigrant populations in Canada and discuss how social work professionals might benefit from a greater understanding and application of RPL with clients who are newcomers to Canada.

While the recent global recession has increased unemployment rates in the short term, this country’s long-term prospects remain unchanged and immigration is an important part of the solution to this ongoing labour problem.

Issues facing immigrant professionals

There are few events more traumatic in an individual’s life than those resulting from leaving one’s country to resettle in another. While recognizing the full spectrum of social, psychological, financial, political, spiritual, behavioural and logistical issues that comprise complete cultural change, this section focuses

on several professionally related concerns facing Canada’s immigrant professionals.

Foreign credential recognition (FCR). Regulatory bodies depend on international qualification assessments that are matched against the educational prerequisites for licensure by regulators. The traditional model of FCR, focusing on formal academic training and the resultant transcripts, provides accurate and comprehensive information on the comparability of foreign qualifications with Canadian education systems (ACEESC, 2008). In Alberta, there are some exceptions to this process, notably with the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta (CARNA) and the Association of Science and Engineering Technology Professionals of Alberta (ASET). Both use RPL processes to assess relevant prior learning and determine the need for further postsecondary upgrading. Duvekot and Konrad (2007) argue that “the formal procedures of teaching, training and assessment describe only a very limited part of the individual learning potential or competencies. Competencies acquired in informal and non-formal situations are also essential for optimal performance on the labour market or in social functions.” Alternative forms of foreign credential recognition, particularly those using RPL, ensure that all prior learning (formal, informal and non-formal) is considered when assessing the skills of inter-nationally educated professionals.

Language skills. A major barrier to gainful employment for immigrant professionals is their “insufficient knowledge of official languages,” which results in lower earnings and a lower employment rate (Statistics Canada, 2008). Although basic language training somewhat addresses this situation, “there is a need [to take] language training to higher levels...in order to help newcomers learn occupation-specific terms to gain employment” (CIC, 2004). Furthermore, “advanced general English proficiency does not necessarily guarantee professional English proficiency, since professional communication demands and expectations are culturally specific” (EMCN, 2007).

A further complication to successful integration for immigrant professionals is the difficulty in gaining licensure because of poor language skills. The Canadian Council of Professional Engineers (2004) states; “Without a minimum level of proficiency in English or French, the licensing process becomes very onerous and requires an inordinate amount of time on the part of the international engineering graduate and regulatory body staff.” Even if training for immigrant professionals, such as engineers, enables them to acquire the necessary skills in their field, occupation-specific language skills remain the single most common factor contributing to—or limiting—immigrant professionals obtaining licensure and employment within their professions.

Access to postsecondary education. In Canada, non-formal and informal learning acquired through training, workplace offerings, non-accredited institutions or simply from life experience is generally not recognized for transfer by accredited postsecondary institutions. Immigrants wishing to upgrade their foreign-acquired skills or to obtain university degrees necessary for licensing can find themselves repeating previously obtained education because their transfer credits or informal or experiential prior learning goes unrecognized. Expensive retraining also limits immigrants’ ability to obtain the necessary employment in order to provide for their families (CMEC, 2007).

Athabasca University: Modelling RPL practice in a learning context

This section describes Athabasca University’s prior learning process and provides theoretical background to RPL practice and process. By preparing portfolios that demonstrate their knowledge through the selection, reflection, connection and projection of learning, learners can most fully show their prior knowledge. In so doing, learners’ cognitive engagement with their learning creates new knowledge—of self,

of personal growth and of professional growth. The steps for preparing a portfolio require careful thought:

The dossier catalogues and stores the language samples that show how the benchmark level, which is recorded in the passport, was reached. The passport acts as a measuring stick of the learner’s level of achievement.

Reflection. For adult learners, learning is a voluntary action that centres on things already known. A process of thoughtful reflection helps learners understand experience beyond the isolated, secular level. Helping learners interpret their experiences is a process intended to elevate their stories beyond their own immediacy to more generic levels of knowledge.

Selection. Adults celebrate their rich and varied learning. When preparing portfolios, they must mine their past experiences selectively for the events that can effectively anchor the learning narratives they are creating. Their selections constitute a type of scaffolding upon which they build the stories of their learning. Selecting experiences and denoting them as valuable become integral parts of building self-knowledge and self-confidence.

Connection. Once the learners identify the “knowledge items,” they arrange them in an appropriate order. The theme of connecting experience to meaning recurs in situated cognition theory (Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989) and in transformation theory (Mezirow, in Welton, 1995). Using Mezirow’s processes for transformational learning that critically reflects upon and modifies current assumptions

and understandings, the RPL process also helps learners to build knowledge.

Projection. The last step in demonstrating learning using portfolios is determining a presentation method—to present the evidence of learning in an acceptable format. In so doing, learners meet another set of learning outcomes by fulfilling generic outcomes, such as using and constructing documents accurately, communicating appropriately in text as well as understanding one's learning style and adapting it to tasks at hand. The importance of these skills is reflected in national-level outcomes for all learners (HRSDC, 2006).

Practical applications of RPL with immigrant professionals

Issues of foreign credential recognition, language skills and access to postsecondary education are being addressed in Canada through the use of portfolio practices. The Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers (EMCN) uses portfolios as a part of programs and services that address the recognition of prior language learning, the acquisition of language for the workplace and the recognition of competencies acquired abroad for transfer to the Canadian labour market. Athabasca University recognizes non-formal and informal learning through a RPL portfolio process that focuses on both developing and naming students' learning. Ryerson University uses a portfolio development course module as an important part of their bridging programs for internationally educated finance professionals and social workers.

Engineering language portfolio

Through joint funding from Citizenship and Immigration Canada and Alberta's Enhanced Language Training program, EMCN recently developed the Engineering Language Portfolio (ELP) as part of a major project to benchmark the language demands of the engineering profession.

The ELP, grounded in occupation-specific language as well as actual workplace tasks, directly addresses the language barrier for international engineering graduates (IEGs). The ELP builds on the European Language Portfolio and on a recent research study (EMCN, 2007) to develop an occupation-specific language portfolio. The ELP has three parts:

- **Language Passport:** Summarizes the owner's linguistic identity by briefly recording second/foreign languages learned, formal language qualifications achieved, significant experiences of second/foreign language use and the owner's assessment of his or her current proficiency in the owner's second/foreign language.
- **Language Biography:** Sets language learning targets, monitors progress and records especially important language learning and intercultural experiences.
- **Dossier:** Contains a selection of work that in the owner's opinion best represents his or her second/foreign language proficiency (Little, 2002).

The tripartite structure of the ELP is designed with pedagogical and reporting functions (Little, 2002). The reporting function presents additional information about the learner's language experiences and provides evidence of proficiency and achievements (Little, 2002). The pedagogical function promotes plurilingualism, raises cultural awareness, makes the language learning process more transparent to the owner and fosters development of learner autonomy (Little, 2002). The biography incorporates reflective, intercultural and Canadian Language Benchmark (CLB) "can-do" exercises for learners to better understand and develop their English language skills. The dossier catalogues and stores the language samples that show how the benchmark level, which is recorded in the passport, was reached. The passport acts as a measuring stick of the learner's level of achievement.

The dossier can be used in a job interview in order to showcase learners’ language abilities (Crosbie, 2006). Cummins (2007) mentions that it is important for learners to include information that focuses “on job descriptions for potential employers.” As this applies to the dossier section, learners include information for the shared dossier that best represents their qualifications for employment.

Accounting self-assessment tool

This RPL project for internationally educated accounting professionals (IEAPs) at EMCN was funded by the Canada’s Foreign Credential Recognition (FCR) program. The project developed a self-assessment tool based on a similar tool developed some years ago by Alberta’s engineering technology regulator (ASET). Both tools are questionnaires through which respondents self-assess their skill level for a variety of occupational competencies and provide artifacts as evidence of their self-assessment. The accounting competencies were taken from the competency maps/frameworks developed by the three national accounting bodies. By identifying the core competencies for accountants in Canada, this tool allows IEAPs to more effectively identify their areas of strength alongside those areas in which additional training or upgrading can be focused. This process of creating a professional skills portfolio can also build confidence in immigrant professionals who may not recognize how much they have to offer within the Canadian context.

While EMCN seeks acceptance of this tool as an alternate or supplementary method of foreign credential and prior learning recognition by the regulators, use of this self-reflective portfolio process can immediately benefit respondents through a better understanding of their professional skills and abilities. Therefore, a structured portfolio course integrated into the existing Accountants’ Bridging Program at EMCN could be an effective use of the competencies identified in developing this tool.

An ongoing project, currently a collaboration between EMCN and Vancouver Community College, is benchmarking the level of occupation-specific language in the accounting field in preparation for the future development of an ELP for accountants.

This process of creating a professional skills portfolio can also build confidence in immigrant professionals who may not recognize how much they have to offer within the Canadian context.

The reality and potential of RPL within a social work context

The philosophy that shapes both RPL practice and social work is similar in that both work from strengths-based perspectives to reduce or eliminate individual and structural barriers. Integral to both practices is respect for clients’ rights to self-determination and control over future goals and plans.

Social workers and immigrant-serving agencies alike are conscious of the devastating socio-economic loss to Canada as a consequence of the underutilization of immigrant skills and talents (Reitz, 2007), and recognize that this loss is felt by individuals, families and communities in the form of exclusion, racism and marginalization. RPL practices can create access for previously excluded groups of immigrants to postsecondary education, licensure and employment and help to build self-confidence in one’s skills and potential. At the same time, immigrant-serving agencies can help clients deal with the social, psychological and financial aspects of settlement by

applying their understanding of the contextual and structural issues surrounding settlement and integration.

Ryerson University's Internationally Educated Social Work Professionals (IESW) Bridging Program is based on a university–community partnership, managed by the Chang School of Continuing Education, the School of Social Work and Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Services. Funded by the governments of Ontario and Canada, the program addresses socio-economic integration of IESWs in Ontario. To participate, program applicants must have their credentials assessed by CASW as equivalent to at least a Canadian BSW.

RPL practices can create access for previously excluded groups of immigrants to postsecondary education, licensure and employment and help to build self-confidence in one's skills and potential.

The IESW Bridging Program has integrated RPL tools into its work with immigrants who currently, or plan to, reside in Ontario. Program goals are to assist IESWs to make informed decisions about their individual pathway to employment in the field of social work, plan and prepare for professional integration prior to and upon their arrival in Ontario and reduce the time from their arrival to employment in the field of social work. Ryerson's self-assessment tool for IESWs helps learners identify their transferable skills and educates them about the application of each competency within the Canadian context. Learners are able to benchmark their prior learning and experience for 65 competencies

in 6 main categories: Skills, Knowledge, Values, Personal Qualities, Ethical Behaviour/Professionalism, and Leadership. In addition, learners obtain additional information about the scope of social workers' responsibilities and about credential assessment, language requirements and industry regulations.

For IESWs residing in Ontario, Ryerson's IESW Bridging Program offers a certificate in Canadian social work practice that recognizes prior learning during the admissions process and helps learners transfer their previous experience into the Canadian context when completing course work. The certificate program provides a professional development pathway that helps learners gain confidence and knowledge of Canadian social work practice. The program also offers individual consultations to participants to help them recognize their prior learning and create individualized plans that match their level of education and experience to their career paths.

RPL practices in general can assist social workers in dealing with a variety of clients. Recent research (McLaren & LaPointe, 2008) into the impact of RPL with young, at-risk adults indicated a link between the portfolio process and building motivation, identifying skills and encouraging young adults to achieve a goal. The study concluded that young, at-risk adults who are used to having their faults and failures pointed out can be positively impacted when their skills are recognized through a portfolio process. Social workers might consider the positive impact of portfolios as a useful client intervention. Obtaining certification as a portfolio practitioner from an organization like the Halifax Prior Learning Centre might also enhance a social worker's efficacy in practice.

Conclusion

The significance of immigrants to Canada will increase as the current labour shortage worsens (Bloom, 2008). Smoothing the transition into the Canadian workforce for immigrant

professionals is vital for their successful settlement and integration. Agencies and institutions serving newcomers to Canada have developed processes to meet the key needs of immigrants through portfolio-based approaches to foreign credential recognition, language skills acquisition and postsecondary education and training.

As providers of culturally sensitive services, social workers and agencies serving immigrants work together to actively assist their clients to obtain recognition of their prior learning, access appropriate education or training and gain meaningful employment. The use of learning portfolios can help make possible the realization of each of these critical goals, hasten the timely integration of skilled workers into the workforce and mitigate the serious and lasting consequences of exclusion.

References

- Alboim, N., Finnie, R., & Meng, R. (2005). The discounting of immigrants' skills in Canada: Evidence and policy recommendations. *Choices*, 11.
- Alliance of Credential Evaluation Services of Canada (ACESC). (2008). Retrieved on September 24, 2008 from <http://www.canalliance.org/aboutus.htm>
- Bloom, M. (2008). *Broadening the skilled workforce: recognizing learning, competencies, and credentials*. Keynote presentation at Shifting the discourse: Mobilizing adult learning in Canada/CCL symposium (Ottawa, ON).
- Brown, J.S., Collins, A., & Duguid, A. (1989, January–February). Situated cognition and the culture of learning. *Educational Researcher*, 32–42.
- Canada. Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC). (2004). *Evaluation of the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) program*. Retrieved from <http://www.cic.gc.ca/EnGLIsh/resources/evaluation/linc/index.asp>
- . Statistics Canada. (2008). *The Daily*, July 18. Retrieved on September 24, 2008 from <http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/080718/d080718.pdf>
- Canadian Council of Professional Engineers. (2004). *From consideration to integration: Final report from phase II: Fact sheet*. Retrieved on September 24, 2008 from <http://www.engineerscanada.ca/fc2i/e/documents/FC2IreportEnglish.pdf>
- Canada. Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC). (2006). *Essential skills*. Retrieved from http://srv108.services.gc.ca/english/general/ho_me_e.shtml
- Council of Ministers of Education (CMEC). (2007). *OECD activity: Recognition of non-formal and informal learning (RNFIL)*. Report on provincial/territorial activities and pan-Canadian overview.
- Crosbie, V. (2006). *From Policy to Pedagogy: Widening the Discourse and Practice of the Learning Society in the European Union*. Dublin, Ireland: SALIS.
- Cummins, P. (2007). LinguaFolio: American model for the European language portfolio. *The Modern Language Journal*, 91, 117–121.
- Duvekot, R., & Konrad, J. (2007). *Towards a transnational concept of valuing lifelong learning: Some practical reflections on developing theory*. Retrieved on May 9, 2008 from <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/166725.htm>
- Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers (EMCN). (2007). *Benchmarking the Language Demands of the Engineering Profession in Alberta*. Edmonton, AB: EMCN.
- Little, D. (2002). The European Language Portfolio: Structure, origins, implementation and challenges. *Language Teaching*, 35, 182–189.
- McLaren, J., & Lapointe, M. (2008). *Prior learning assessment and recognition with young at risk adults: Project final report*. Cornwall, ON: Upper Canada Leger Centre for Education and Training.
- McNiven, J.D., & Foster, M. (2009). *The developing workforce problem: Confronting Canadian labour shortages in the coming decades*. Halifax, NS: Atlantic Institute for Market Studies.
- Michelson, E., & Mandell, A. (2004). *Portfolio development and the assessment of prior learning: Perspectives, models, and practices*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Reitz, J. (2007). Immigrant employment success in Canada, Part I: Individual and contextual causes. *International Migration and Integration / Revue de l'intégration et de la migration internationale*, 8, p. 11–36.
- Schmidtke, O., Kovacev, M., & Marry, B. (2006). Policy memo: Canada's immigration and integration policies: A multi-national evaluation of labour market integration of skilled immigrants. *Policy workshop: Social policy and labour market integration in Canada and the EU*. Ottawa: Carleton University European Studies Centre.

Vlăsceanu, L., Grünberg, L., & Pârlea, D. (2004). *Quality assurance and accreditation: A glossary of basic terms and definitions*. Retrieved from <http://www.cepes.ro/publications/Default.htm>

Welton, M. (Ed.). (1995). *In Defense of the Lifeworld: Critical Perspectives on Adult Learning*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Biographical notes

Stephen Sutherland is the director of the Ontario-based Centre for Applied Settlement and Integration Studies (www.casis-canada.org) through which he offers research and consulting services to the settlement community.

Dianne Conrad is the director of the Centre for Learning Accreditation at Athabasca University where she is responsible for managing AU's prior learning process.

Mark Wheller is a PhD student at the University of Alberta and works as a research consultant in the Edmonton region. He has over three years experience in immigrant and settlement-related integration issues.

Tej Wadhwa is the program manager for the Internationally Educated Social Work Professionals (IESW) Bridging Program at the G. Raymond Chang School of Continuing Education, Ryerson University.

Note

- ¹ RPL has many names. It is also known as APEL (Accreditation of Prior [and] Experiential Learning; PLA (Prior Learning Assessment); PLAR (Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition); APL (Assessment of Prior Learning); RDA (*Reconnaissance des acquis*); and EVC (*Erkennen van elders of informeel Verworven Competenties*) (Michelson & Mandell, 2004).

“Canadian Experience,” Employment Challenges, and Skilled Immigrants

A Close Look Through “Tacit Knowledge”

Izumi Sakamoto • Matthew Chin • Melina Young

Abstract

Skilled immigrants to Canada continue to experience high rates of underemployment and unemployment. A lack of recognition of foreign credentials and experience, language and communication barriers, discrimination and employers’ requirement for “Canadian experience” all contribute to this disconnect. This article presents the preliminary findings of a research project exploring what “Canadian experience” means in the context of skilled immigrant employment. Given confusion over “Canadian experience,” the authors argue for use of the term “tacit knowledge.” While Canadian experience seems to encompass hard skills, the tacit dimension of Canadian experience (soft skills) is much harder to acquire. Not everything about how one needs to operate within a new workplace (and new cultural environment) can be explained in words (codified knowledge). Some of this knowledge always remains tacit. A structured, nurturing environment (e.g., successful mentoring and internships) could provide a context in which immigrants could obtain tacit knowledge. Ultimately, we need broad structural changes in how immigrants are perceived and treated in our society. In the interim, the authors believe that acquiring tacit knowledge will provide immigrants with a more nuanced understanding of the Canadian job market and thus a strategy to address this complex issue.

Keywords: Immigrants • Canadian experience • immigration services • tacit knowledge • soft skills

Over the past two decades, the Canadian federal government has acknowledged a skilled labour shortage. Given the national demographic trends of an increasingly aging population and decreasing birthrates, Canada has attempted to address this shortage by attracting skilled immigrants to ensure the country’s continued economic well-being (Citizenship and Immigration Canada [CIC], 2008). Yet despite an articulated need for skilled labour and an immigration system that grants entry to skilled immigrants on the basis of a positive evaluation of their

potential to contribute to the Canadian economy (Reitz, 2005), current skilled immigrants to Canada experience high rates of underemployment and unemployment and earn less than their Canadian-born counterparts (Picot & Hou, 2003; Statistics Canada, 2005). This is truer now than for previous immigration cohorts (Picot, 2008). Major reasons for this disconnect include: lack of recognition of foreign credentials and experience; language and communication barriers; discrimination; and employers’ requirement for “Canadian experience” (Weiner, 2008).

Focusing on the last of these barriers, the authors are conducting a federally funded research project (the Canadian Experience Project), which explores how “Canadian experience” plays into the contradiction between the economic need for skilled immigrants and the employment challenges they face. In collaboration with several Toronto-based community agencies serving immigrants, the research team collected various kinds of data through semi-structured interviews with skilled immigrants looking for employment, their service providers and mentors, as well as Human Resources personnel; arts-based focus groups with job-seeking skilled immigrants, their mentors and service providers; participant observation in job search workshops and bridging programs; and archival research. What follows are the preliminary findings on the notion of “Canadian experience” using a constructivist grounded-theory approach (Charmaz, 2006).

“Canadian experience” is more nuanced. Some believe that it serves as a means of exploitation: “Employers use Canadian experience as a tool to take advantage of immigrants and obtain free labour.” In attempting to obtain “Canadian experience,” some job-seeking skilled immigrants come to realize that the term means a world view into which they have to be socialized, as opposed to a textbook to be memorized. One focus group participant states, “I would like to know about the Canadian culture and the right way to get a job.”

“Employers use Canadian experience as a tool to take advantage of immigrants and obtain free labour.”

Canadian experience

You are stung with the word because they say, you have 25 years of experience you have been all over the world but you don’t have Canadian experience. Come on, this is Mars? This is Saturn?...But in here they say you don’t know how to do this the Canadian way. (Job-seeking immigrant engineer¹)

Many skilled immigrant newcomers to Canada believe that “Canadian experience” means having work experience in Canada. They do not understand how they can be asked to possess this when they have just arrived. Often, more recently arrived skilled immigrants seeking employment perceive “Canadian experience” as concrete knowledge, and look to social service providers as a source of obtaining this transferable information. Those very recent immigrant research participants have asked: “Canadian work experience. Where can I get that?” Skilled immigrants who have been in Canada for longer periods recognize that

Service providers working with immigrants are more careful in talking about “Canadian experience,” with some musing that this is largely an “abused term.” One administrator of an immigrant-serving agency states that “the requirement for Canadian work experience may in part be about ensuring a candidate has the appropriate technical skills, but it is often about the cultural competency in the workplace.” This administrator also sees a strong need to unpack “Canadian (work) experience” to examine to what extent employers use it to seek technical abilities and/or workplace cultural knowledge. In the meantime, this agency provides a multitude of services to help immigrant successfully obtain employment by addressing issues such as “the understanding of the workplace, of language, of some of the norms that make it easier as somebody coming from another country, to be comfortable, [with] the cultural [aspects] of our workplace or workplaces.”

In working with skilled immigrants, service providers use the language of “hard skills,”

which describe technical abilities that can be quantified and enumerated on a resume, and “soft skills,” skills that are culturally embedded, such as communication skills, working with others (teamwork), and conflict resolution, and are demonstrated through interviews and other interactions. Contrary to what many skilled immigrants may think, soft skills are just as important as hard skills. One service provider states, “I’ve had clients who are teachers and who went to interviews thinking that since they’re a science teacher, they’ll be asked about science or about math. They don’t do that, they ask [about] your soft skills.”

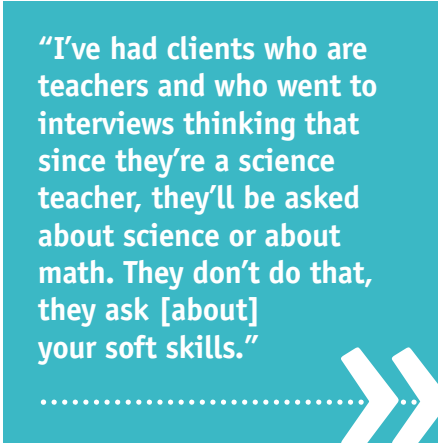
In this sense, soft skills serve as one way to talk about Canadian (work) experience. One social service worker states that “when they [potential employers] refer to Canadian experience, most of the time they’re referring to soft skills, because the hard skills, you can check.” For many employers, assessing Canadian experience through soft skills is a way of gauging how potential employees will “fit” within their work environments. One job developer states, “There are protocols on how interviews are being done...you are assessed in terms of how you fit into that culture.” From this perspective, employers are concerned about what they consider to be the unanticipated costs of hiring someone who they perceive as not “fitting in.” One service provider explains:

I think the challenge is the *hidden cost* from the employer perspective and that’s why they get on about the Canadian experience... so the goal of the participant is to let them know that there isn’t going to be any additional or hidden costs in training them (*emphasis added by the authors*).

Yet, while employers are concerned about potential additional expense in terms of training, job-seeking skilled immigrants find this process to be confusing, frustrating and unfair. One skilled immigrant shares this:

There are a lot of people with a lot of experience, a lot of knowledge, and you come here and they say, “You know what?

“I’ve had clients who are teachers and who went to interviews thinking that since they’re a science teacher, they’ll be asked about science or about math. They don’t do that, they ask [about] your soft skills.”



You don’t have Canadian experience.” For me, Canadian experience is the most stupid thing.

In seeking to obtain employment, skilled immigrants pursue many avenues to try to demonstrate that they possess Canadian experience; that they possess the appropriate soft skills to allow them to “fit in.” Some skilled immigrants deliberately take on forms of speaking and behaving that closely fit what they believe employers to be looking for. One job-seeking immigrant shares the mental checklist of body postures that he goes through when he attends an interview:

If you sit back in the chair during the interview then you are perceived as too lazy. If you sit forward in the chair then you are seen as too eager. If you place your hands on the interviewer’s desk then you are seen as invading the person’s personal space.

Others take on a more comprehensive transformation by adopting entire personas². One mentor described a job interview strategy that she shared with the immigrant she was mentoring by speaking a particular type of English:

And so now I created two characters for her. So on the one hand I am speaking very highly of her Monglish [a hybrid of English and Malayan] culture because it’s beautiful

the way she does it, they should keep it in her family. And we're trying to create another character for her when she uses English as opposed to Monglish, so that she should feel that kind of switch.

Overall, many people expressed that Canadian society celebrates multiculturalism, but individual expressions of culture (including linguistic variations when speaking English) should be toned down in order to fit into the Canadian work environment. In fact, knowing how and when to express cultural and/or linguistic difference may also be part of demonstrating competencies in soft skills. One service provider used the word "implicit knowledge" to refer to what skilled immigrants need in order to appear competent in job interviews (e.g., knowing how to engaging in self-promotion without seeming to be too humble or too aggressive).

Some seasoned immigrants indicated that acquiring Canadian experience through paid work, volunteer experiences, mentoring, internships, and/or co-op programs was very helpful in eventually obtaining professional jobs.

Similar to "Canadian (work) experience," terms such as "soft skills," "communication skills" and "Canadian workplace culture(s)" are used frequently without being clearly defined. How do these terms relate to Canadian experience? While frequently seen as necessary for obtaining employment, soft skills may not

always reflect the entirety of what employers are looking for with respect to Canadian (work) experience. One job search counselor explains that employers may associate hard skills with Canadian experience as well. For example, civil engineers need to learn about unique environmental conditions in Canada to construct a bridge. Canadian experience may then encompass both the hard skills of how particular jobs are accomplished in Canada, as well as soft skills, which are more difficult to articulate and may include understanding Canadian workplace culture and acquiring communication skills necessary to operate effectively within it. Some seasoned immigrants indicated that acquiring Canadian experience through paid work, volunteer experiences, mentoring, internships, and/or co-op programs was very helpful in eventually obtaining professional jobs.

Tacit knowledge

Given the confusion and apparent overlap of these similar terms, one helpful way of thinking about the implicit dimension (e.g., soft skills) of Canadian experience is offered by the term "tacit knowledge." According to Polyani (1966), tacit knowledge can only be acquired through experience, through "learning by doing" on the job or through contextual, relational, situated learning, such as practicums, internships, mentoring and on-the-job training (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Nonaka and Takeuchi contend that tacit knowledge is, "personal, context-specific and therefore hard to formalize and communicate," and exists in opposition to explicit knowledge, which is "transmittable in formal, systematic language" (1995, p. 59). The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (2000) identifies four different types of knowledge: know-what, know-why, know-how and know-who. The first two are explicit, while the latter two are tacit forms of knowledge. Thus, job-seeking skilled immigrants may have the know-what —for example, they have the ability to work with

complex computer technology. But they may be less familiar with knowing how, for instance, to engage in small talk with co-workers.

While it is important to examine all forms of knowledge, it is also important to look at how this knowledge is transmitted, so that if, in fact, Canadian experience includes tacit knowledge, service providers may strategize about how to transmit this to newcomers who may want it. Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) posit four modes of knowledge conversion (Figure 1), depending on the initial form of knowledge and the form in which this knowledge takes after transference, and contend that individuals move along a certain trajectory in dialogue with all four modes. *Socialization* takes place through the creation of a shared field of interaction and allows individuals to access the tacit knowledge of others without the use of language (e.g., immigrants learning typical workplace behaviour through observation at internships). *Externalization* allows individuals to articulate their knowledge with others, while *combination* constitutes the communication of knowledge with others, from which new knowledge is created (e.g., a job search workshop instructor identifying what constitutes Canadian experience). Finally, through *internalization*, individuals acquire knowledge by way of experience or “learning by doing” and, through the “digestion” of materials, come to embody this knowledge.

We posit that tacit knowledge provides a useful framework for thinking about “Canadian experience,” because it speaks to the interaction between the unspoken and

codified (explicit) aspects of knowledge. Tacit knowledge is a more precise concept and can better guide program development for skilled immigrants, compared to the more amorphous terms like “soft skills” or “workplace culture.”

Conclusion

In this article, we have presented preliminary themes from our ongoing research project investigating skilled immigrants’ search for Canadian experience. In our project, skilled immigrants, their service providers, mentors and HR professionals who interact with immigrants have shared with us their experience that there is no universal definition for “Canadian experience.” The enforcement of this requirement for immigrants is highly problematic. Examining this concept offers important messages for those social workers among us who are working with and advocating for immigrants. Beyond the technical requirements that can be regarded as “hard skills,” several government-funded programs seem to effectively access the tacit knowledge embodied in “Canadian experience.” Successfully matched mentors can offer a great deal of tacit knowledge through informal interactions with the immigrants they mentor. Likewise, supervisors and co-workers working with immigrant interns offer a tremendous amount of knowledge and skills that immigrants can witness, observe and internalize. This process may occur at a tacit-to-tacit dimension

Figure 1
Four modes of knowledge conversion

		To	
		Tacit knowledge	Explicit knowledge
From	Tacit knowledge	Socialization	Externalization
	Explicit knowledge	Internalization	Combination

Source: Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995, p. 62

(socialization), or at the interface of the tacit/explicit dimensions of the required knowledge and skills at work (internalization/externalization).

The key point is that not everything about how to operate within a new workplace (and new cultural environment) can be explained in words (codified knowledge). Some of this knowledge always remains tacit. However, as humans we have the capacity to learn these tacit dimensions of knowledge in a structured, nurturing environment. Thus, it is important for social workers to try to foster this type of environment when working with job-seeking skilled immigrants. Finally, we would like to offer a word of caution. Whenever social workers and service providers work with immigrants, there is a danger of facilitating assimilation. As mentioned earlier, employers' requirement of "Canadian experience" can be seen as an injunction to fit in. While it is important to support immigrants in trying to obtain employment, it is also important to allow service users to decide for themselves the extent to which they may be willing to change themselves to reach this goal (Sakamoto, 2007). Further, it is crucial that social workers critically assess what it is that we are facilitating immigrants to fit into. Such a discussion is extremely relevant given the history of social work in North America, whereby social workers, who no doubt had the best of intentions, sought to address the socio-economic problems immigrant groups faced by transforming them into the image of dominant society (Sakamoto, 2003). At the same time, the use of the concept tacit knowledge affords us a more sophisticated understanding of Canadian experience, this elusive yet persistent requirement that skilled immigrants face before accessing successful employment. We can then ask whether tacit knowledge in Canadian experience is really necessary, and if so, what/to what extent/where/how it is needed. These questions will, in turn, help us to design services for immigrant professionals and to strategize

about advocating for structural changes in the way we perceive and treat immigrants in our society. Several agencies have sought to foster change in the way hiring companies operate (Kukushkin & Watt, 2009; York South Simcoe Training and Adjustment Board, 2009; Larose & Tillman, 2009) and the resources these entities offer may assist social workers who collaborate with these companies (as job developers, for instance) to transform their practices. In the interim, the authors believe that the concept of tacit knowledge provides a more nuanced understanding and hopefully a solution to addressing the complex issue of Canadian experience.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank the research participants and community agencies who have generously shared their time and experiences with us. Thanks also go to research assistants Sehr Athar, Theon Harrichand, Lele Truong, Yi Wei, Jaemin Kim, Jessica Bleuer, and Yue Jian. The research presented herein is a part of a larger project funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) Standard Grant to the first author.

References

- Canada. Citizenship and Immigration Canada [CIC]. (2008). *Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration*. Ottawa.
- . Statistics Canada. (2005). *Longitudinal survey of immigrants to Canada: A portrait of early settlement experiences*. Ottawa.
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis*. London: Sage.
- DuBois, W.E.B. (1994/1903). *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: Gramercy Books.
- Kukushkin, V., & Watt, D. (2009). Immigrant-friendly businesses: Effective practices for attracting, integrating, and retaining immigrants in Canadian workplaces. Conference Board of Canada. Toronto.

LaFramboise, T., Coleman, H.L.K., & Gerton, J. (1993). Psychological impact of biculturalism: Evidence and theory. *Psychological Bulletin*, 114, 395–412.

Larose G. & Tillman G. (2009). Valorizing immigrants' Non-Canadian work experience. *Work and Learning Knowledge Centre*. Ottawa.

Nonaka, I. & Takeuchi, H. (1995). *The Knowledge-Creating Company: How Japanese Companies Create the Dynamics of Innovation*. New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2000). *Knowledge management in the learning society*. Washington, D.C.: OECD Publications and Information Center.

Picot, G. (2008). *Immigrant economic and social outcomes in Canada: Research and data development at Statistics Canada*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

Picot, G. & Hou, F. (2003). *The rise in low-income rates among immigrants in Canada*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

Polanyi, M. (1966). *The Tacit Dimension*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday.

Reitz, J. (2005). Tapping immigrants' skills: New directions for Canadian immigration policy in the knowledge economy. *Choices*, 11(1) (by Institute for Research on Public Policy).

Sakamoto, I. (2003). Changing images and similar dynamics: Historical patterning of foreignness in the social work profession. In R. Saunders (Ed.), *The Concept of Foreign: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue* (pp. 237–279). Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

Sakamoto, I. (2007). A critical examination of immigrant acculturation: Toward an anti-oppressive social work with immigrant adults in a pluralistic society. *British Journal of Social Work*, 37(3), 515–535.

York South Simcoe Training & Adjustment Board. (2009). *Newcomers. A resource for your business*.

Weiner, N. (2008). Breaking down barriers to labour market integration of newcomers in Toronto. *IRPP Choices*, 14(10), 1–37.

Biographical notes

Izumi Sakamoto, MSW, RSW, MA, PhD is an associate professor of social work, University of Toronto, who studied social work and psychology in Japan and the US. She was the lead researcher for the SSHRC-funded Canadian Experience project presented herein.

Matthew Chin, B.A. (hon.) was the research coordinator of the Canadian Experience project. He is a PhD student in the Joint Program of Social Work and Anthropology at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, USA.

Melina Young is an Independent Researcher, currently residing in Toronto. She holds a master's degree in business from the London School of Economics, and was a research assistant for the Canadian Experience project.

Notes

¹ This and other quotes cited in this article are taken from interviews and focus groups conducted for the Canadian experience project, funded by the Social Sciences & Humanities Research Council of Canada. Individual identities may have been altered to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants.

² Creating different personas or increasing cultural repertoires (e.g., “code switching”) as a strategy for cultural or linguistic minorities is not new. As early as the early 1900s, an African American visionary and educator, W.E.B. Du Bois (1994/1903) talked about the need for blacks to have “double consciousness.” More recently psychological literature on biculturalism elaborates on the idea of code switching (Laframboise et al., 1993).

A Sociocultural Perspective of Mental Health Service Use by Chinese Immigrants

Lin Fang

Abstract

The underutilization of mental health services by Chinese immigrants is a critical health and equality issue. This article reviews sociocultural factors that may contribute to low mental health service use across individual, family, cultural and system domains, and discusses ways to improve the responsiveness of social work practice to the mental health needs of Chinese immigrants. Based on a critical analysis of literature, the article concludes that Chinese immigrants may be deterred from seeking help for their mental health problems because of the cultural explanation of mental illness, shame and stigma, psychosomatic symptom presentation, help-seeking preference, effect of discrimination, lack of recognition by general practitioners, a lack of accessibility to linguistically and culturally appropriate mental health services, and the use of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM). Specific social work practice considerations for assessing and treating Chinese immigrants are discussed. Social workers are encouraged to understand the connections among mind, body, and spirit, and to demonstrate sensitivity to clients' symptom presentations. We also encourage social workers to learn about the cultural and linguistic meanings associated with mental health and mental illness, and to assume a proactive role in inquiring about CAM use with a non-judgmental attitude. Social workers should strive to work with family members, become involved in community outreach and education, and consider culturally-appropriate program models.

Keywords: Mental health • mental illness • Chinese • immigrants • service utilization

According to Census 2006, Canada is the home of 667,405 immigrants of Chinese origin (Statistics Canada, 2009) and the Chinese continue to be the largest immigrant group (Milan & Martel, 2008; Statistics Canada, 2008). Immigrants often experience elevated levels of psychological distress in the period that follows immigration (Beiser & Edwards, 1994). Job insecurity, altered family dynamics, economic hardships, and cultural differences between the country of origin and the host country all contribute to heightened psychological stress during the first years following immigration

(Ritsner & Ponizovsky, 1999; Tang, Oatley & Toner, 2007). Paradoxically, studies conducted in North America have repeatedly reported that Chinese immigrants underuse mental health services (Abe-Kim et al., 2007; Chen & Kazanjian, 2002; Chen, Kazanjian, Wong & Goldner, 2010; Kung, 2003; Matsuoka, Breaux & Ryujin, 1997; Sue & Sue, 1999; Tiwari & Wang, 2008). By the time Chinese immigrants finally receive formal mental health treatment, they tend to present more severe symptoms compared to non-immigrant users, are harder to treat, and frequently require lengthy

inpatient hospitalization (Chen, Kazanjian, Wong & Reid, 2009; Chen, Sullivan, Lu & Shibusawa, 2003; Snowden & Cheung, 1990).

To address disparities in mental health service use among Chinese immigrants, it is necessary to first understand factors that may contribute to their service use pattern. From a sociocultural perspective, this article reviews causes of mental health service underuse among Chinese immigrants and discusses practice implications.

Factors explaining service underuse among Chinese immigrants are multifaceted, extending across individual, family, cultural and system domains. The first of these is the cultural explanation of mental illness. Cultural beliefs regarding the cause of mental disorders greatly affect service use. The perceived causes of mental illness include moral, religious or cosmological, physiological, psychological, social and genetic factors. From a moral perspective, mental illness is deemed to be a punishment for "misconduct" against Confucian norms, the principles defining interpersonal relations and personal behaviours (Kramer, Kwong, Lee & Chung, 2002; Lin & Lin, 1981). As implicated in the religious or cosmological perspective, mental illness has also been perceived as representing the wrath of supernatural spirits (Gaw, 1993; Koss-Chioino, 2000; Kramer et al., 2002) or ancestors, (Barnes, 1998; Lin & Lin, 1981) induced by clients or other family members. One Toronto study reported that Chinese immigrant women who subscribe to supernatural beliefs tend to hold a negative attitude toward seeking professional help (Fung & Wong, 2007). Traditional medical theory, which considers all illnesses, both physiological and mental, to be imbalances of *yin* and *yang* (Chung, 2002; Ergil, Kramer & Ng, 2002; Ma, 1999), also plays an important role. Psychosocial factors, such as major life events and difficulties, are also considered to contribute to the onset of mental illness (Kramer et al., 2002; Lin & Lin, 1981; Tang et al., 2007). Lastly, genetic transmission and the inheritance of the consequences of familial misconduct may

also be considered causes of mental illness (Lin & Lin, 1981). Each component described above is weighted differently, depending upon the individual and the context.

The effect of stigma among the Chinese is often reflected in a low rate of mental health service use, excessive concern about confidentiality, reluctance to use insurance coverage, and absolute refusal to seek professional help in the face of obvious psychiatric symptoms.

Shame and stigma attached to mental illness may also prevent Chinese immigrants and their families from seeking mental health services (Chung, 2002; Gaw, 1993; Sadavoy, Meier & Ong, 2004). Although stigma is a well-recognized issue across cultures, it may have more severe and decisive consequences among the Chinese (Sue & Sue, 1987). The effect of stigma among the Chinese is often reflected in a low rate of mental health service use, excessive concern about confidentiality, reluctance to use insurance coverage, and absolute refusal to seek professional help in the face of obvious psychiatric symptoms (Gaw, 1993).

Literature suggests that within the collective and family-centered cultural orientation in Chinese society, an individual's mental illness taints family, and naming and shaming extends to ancestors (Kramer et al., 2002; Lin, 1981). Furthermore, seeking mental health services is not only considered shameful for the individual, but also for his family members, ancestors and offspring (Gaw, 1993; Leong

& Lau, 2001). Fear of “losing face” and being derided is common among Chinese families with mentally ill members. This leads to a denial of the existence of mental illness, or attempts to mask the problem with a socially acceptable label. Clearly, family-oriented stigma prevents individuals with mental health needs from receiving timely and appropriate assessment and treatment (Gaw, 1993; Lin, 1981).

Symptom presentation also influences the use of mental health services. Chinese people tend to perceive mental disorders as organic disorders (Lin & Cheung, 1999; Uba, 1994). Often, Chinese clients express their psychological problems in a somatic form (Kung & Lu, 2008), which can explain why *somatization* and *neurasthenia* are commonly observed in Chinese communities. Somatization is “the presentation of personal and interpersonal distress in an idiom of physical complaints together with a coping pattern of medical help-seeking” (Kleinman, Anderson, Finkler, Frankenberg & Young, 1986, p. 51). Consistent with the Chinese cultural context, somatization suppresses the expression of potentially disruptive and ego-centered experiences in order to maintain the harmony of social relations. Transferring the mental disorder to a physical complaint also meshes with a desire to avoid the strong stigma attached to mental illness. Additionally, somatization is consistent with the perceived legitimacy of seeking help for bodily complaints rather than psychological issues (Kleinman, 1981).

Somatization also contributes to the popular use of neurasthenia. Originating in the U.S. in the 1860s, neurasthenia was introduced into China in the early 1900s and has been widely accepted and recognized in Chinese communities (Flaskerud, 2007; Kleinman et al., 1986; Lee, 1998). Neurasthenia is a complaint of increased physical or mental fatigue that reduces individual performance and functioning (World Health Organization, 1993). It often is accompanied by diverse somatic and psychological symptoms, ranging from headaches, dizziness, fatigue, insomnia,

chest discomfort, and gastrointestinal problems, to depression, anxiety, irritability, and anorexia, with psychological issues being secondary to physical problems (Schwartz, 2002). Although neurasthenia was eliminated from the U.S. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* as of 1980 due to its indiscriminate features, laymen and clinicians in mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan continue to apply this term (Flaskerud, 2007; Schwartz, 2002).

The Chinese collective, family-oriented culture also influences Chinese immigrants’ help-seeking preferences. The family, rather than the individual with mental illness, often makes the treatment decisions (Lin & Cheung, 1999; Lin & Lin, 1981). The formal institution is frequently the last resort for people with severe mental illness such as psychotic disorders. Individuals with other types of mental illness, such as depression, neuroses or psychosomatic diseases, hardly ever approach mental health professionals, since these conditions are not regarded as mental health problems (Lin & Cheung, 1999). Kung (2003) studied Chinese adults in the Los Angeles and discovered that 75% of respondents who had emotional needs did not seek help from any resource. Out of the 25% who did seek help, family and friends appeared to be the major source (20%). Moreover, among respondents who had a diagnosable mental disorder, only 15% had ever used mental health services, a rate much lower than the national figure of 25% as reported in the National Comorbidity Study (Kessler et al., 1994).

Attention should also be given to the mental health needs and help-seeking behaviours of Chinese immigrant women. Socialized with and subjugated into a gendered family role, Chinese women, fearful of being judged as incompetent or inadequate, tend to be reluctant to discuss family or personal concerns with outsiders (Chiu, 2004). Although Asian immigrant women report experiencing more psychological stress than men (Chung & Bemak, 2002), and play a key in helping other family members adjust (Wong, 1998), many neglect their own

mental health needs and suffer quietly. The perceived precedence of family concerns over individual issues (O'Mahony & Donnelly, 2007) may restrict immigrant women's efforts in accessing mental health services in the community.

Folk healers such as shamans, physiognomers, geomancers, bonesetters, and fortune-tellers are common components of the way the Chinese manage daily stresses and treat illnesses.

Racism and discrimination are facets of social context that are always present in the lives of visible minorities and can influence mental health service use by Chinese immigrants. The perception of being treated unfairly or with disrespect due to one's race or ethnic background can foster the development of mistrust of service providers and subsequent reduced service use among minority populations (Spencer & Chen, 2004; van Ryn & Fu, 2003). Spencer and Chen (2004) have found that discrimination is associated with greater use of informal services among Chinese Americans, and is also associated with their more frequent seeking of assistance from friends or relatives. Moreover, discrimination that occurs as a result of speaking a different language or having an accent significantly contributes to the types of services people use. Chinese Americans who experienced language discrimination were 2.2 times more likely to use informal services and 2.4 times more likely to seek help from friends or relatives compared to those who did not experience such treatment.


Under-recognition by general practitioners also contributes to underuse of mental health services. Somatization, or focusing on somatic symptoms of mental health issues, naturally leads Chinese clients to consult their general practitioners, rather than seeking help from mental health professionals (Hsu & Folstein, 1997; Kung & Lu, 2008). Chen and Kazanjian (2009) note that many Chinese immigrants tend to seek medical services from general practitioners who share their language and culture, but these practitioners often fail to recognize and address their clients' mental health issues. Moreover, the provider stigma (i.e. physicians' fear of embarrassing their clients) further exacerbates negative feelings and inaccurate myths about mental illnesses, and delays proper referrals and treatment for clients who are in need (Chung, 2002).

Even when individuals, family members or general practitioners recognize the need for mental health services, their efforts to access mental health services are often hampered by the lack of linguistically and culturally appropriate mental health services available (Fung & Wong, 2007; Sadavoy et al., 2004). Research has shown that providing well-trained and culturally matched providers promotes the acceptance of mental health treatment among Chinese immigrants and helps ensure equal access and treatment opportunities (Lin, 1994). However, many mainstream institutions are not equipped with either ethnic-specific professionals or competent interpreters. Long waiting lists also erect a prominent barrier to availability (Sadavoy et al., 2004).

Lastly, the use of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) also influences access to conventional mental health services. Literature suggests that along with traditional Chinese health beliefs, indigenous medical practices exert an important influence on the manifestation of symptoms and health behaviours among Chinese clients (Barnes, 1998; Kleinman et al., 1975, 1978). First, Chinese clients may rely on traditional Chinese

medical practitioners, such as herbalists or acupuncturists, for relief from emotional difficulties (Barnes, 1998; Lin & Cheung, 1999). In addition, as noted earlier, the folk concept that supernatural forces and ancestral deeds cause mental illness is widely accepted in Chinese society. Folk healers such as shamans, physiognomers, geomancers, bonesetters, and fortune-tellers are common components of the way the Chinese manage daily stresses and treat illnesses (Gaw, 1993). In Kung's study (2003), 8% of Chinese respondents with emotional problems had sought help from herbalists, acupuncturists, religious leaders or fortune-tellers.

Social workers' understanding of the interconnections among mind, body, and spirit is essential if they are to provide more relevant, effective and efficient services.



Implications

The above discussion illuminates the definition of mental illness, subsequent help seeking, alternative coping strategies and the interrelationships shaped by cultural beliefs and norms in Chinese communities. As is true for other ethnic groups, multidimensional and complex reasons contribute to mental health service use among Chinese immigrants. Several practice and program considerations to address this underuse of mental health services are discussed below.

Assessment and treatment considerations

Social workers' understanding of the interconnections among mind, body, and spirit is essential if they are to provide more relevant, effective and efficient services. When assessing and treating Chinese immigrants, social workers should demonstrate sensitivity to clients' symptom presentation, as well as to their perspective about their discomfort, which they may not view as mental disorders. Social workers should strive to understand the cultural and linguistic meanings associated with mental health and mental illness. Such knowledge will facilitate their initial working strategies in communicating with clients on mental health-related concerns.

Unexplained somatic symptoms among Chinese clients may be a manifestation of mental health issues (Chung, 2002; Kleinman et al., 1986; Lin & Cheung, 1999). Since clients may present their concerns primarily within the somatoform spectrum and thus mask the underlying mental health problems, social workers should recognize such patterns and assist clients in making connections between their physical and mental health. Furthermore, social workers should learn how to communicate with clients using culturally appropriate and familiar wordings, describe the biopsychosocial basis for mental illness, and discuss possible treatment plans.

Despite the common use of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) among Chinese clients with mental health needs (Fang & Schinke, 2007), social workers may not be aware of such practices (Burge & Albright, 2002). Clients may feel uncomfortable disclosing their CAM use due to the fear of being criticized or scorned by their service providers (VandeCreek, Rogers & Lester, 1999). Indeed, these indigenous approaches to mental health and mental illness are often overlooked and devalued by the empirically driven medical model of mental health, and remain misunderstood and understudied. Neither biomedicine nor the traditional healing paradigm can claim sole

ownership of interpretation regarding health, disease and the healing process (Cook, Becvar & Pontious, 2000). Social workers should assume a more proactive role in inquiring about CAM use during their assessment with a non-judgmental attitude. Such practice can help service providers understand such use, evaluate potential impacts and further coordinate care.

Policy makers and program designers should provide funding and technical support geared towards encouraging the development of culturally appropriate and innovative mental health programs that maximize service capacity in accordance with population needs.

Family can exert a strong influence on a Chinese client’s healthcare decisions, despite each family’s idiosyncratic help-seeking and decision-making patterns. Social workers should not underestimate the pronounced influence of family on the lives of individuals with mental health problems (Kung, 2003; Uba, 1994), and should seek to understand the help-seeking patterns from a family-oriented and gender-sensitive perspective. Furthermore, social workers should strive to engage family members in the help-seeking process by harnessing the potential barriers resulting from poor communication between providers and the client system. A trusting and respectful relationship among clients, family members and providers is likely to foster and maximize the treatment outcome.

Community outreach and education

Community outreach and education are necessary means to raise the awareness of mental health issues and to overcome the stereotypes of mental health problems among Chinese immigrants. Linguistically and culturally appropriate and gender-sensitive information related to mental health can be disseminated to members of the Chinese community through the use of educational brochures, mass media, health fairs, or community workshops. Involving the community in the development, design, and delivery of the programs holds promise for reaching immigrant women (Hyman & Guruge, 2002).

Program development

Policy makers and program designers should provide funding and technical support geared towards encouraging the development of culturally appropriate and innovative mental health programs that maximize service capacity in accordance with population needs. A pioneer program that integrates mental health and primary care services in the Chinese community in New York City has shown promising outcomes in delivering mental health services through culturally sensitive and creative approaches (Chen, Kramer, Chen, Chen & Chung, 2005; Chen, Kramer & Chen, 2003; Fang & Chen, 2004). Aiming to increase clients’ access to mental health services, the program: a) enhances the skills of general practitioners by training them to better identify and treat mental health problems commonly seen in general practice; b) installs a mental health team consisting of psychiatrists, psychiatric social workers, and case workers within a primary care setting; and c) raises community awareness by providing public education on mental health and mental illness. The program has successfully operated for more than a decade, proving that such a collaborative model can create new opportunities for improving access to mental health care, and ultimately enhance the well-being of Chinese immigrants.

Conclusion

Due to cultural explanations of mental illness, stigma, discrimination, help-seeking preferences, and inadequate service provision, Chinese immigrants with mental health needs often become invisible to service providers and are less likely to access mental health services. Culturally sensitive assessment and treatment, community outreach, and innovative program development can facilitate a responsive service environment that is accessible to and culturally appropriate for, Chinese immigrants.

References

- Abe-Kim, J., Takeuchi, D.T., Hong, S., Zane, N., Sue, S., Spencer, M.S., et al. (2007). Use of mental health-related services among immigrant and US-born Asian Americans: Results from the National Latino and Asian American Study. *American Journal of Public Health, 97*(1), 91–98.
- Barnes, L.L. (1998). The psychologizing of Chinese healing practices in the United States. *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry, 22*(4), 413–443.
- Beiser, M., & Edwards, R. (1994). Mental health of immigrants and refugees. *New Directions for Mental Health Services, 61*, 73–86.
- Burge, S., & Albright, T. (2002). Use of complementary and alternative medicine among family practice patients in South Texas. *American Journal of Public Health, 92*(10), 1614–1616.
- Canada. Statistics Canada. (2008). *Canada's ethnocultural mosaic, 2006 Census*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.
- . Statistics Canada. (2009). Language spoken most often at home by immigrant status and broad age groups, 2006 counts, for Canada, provinces and territories. Retrieved from <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2006/dp-pd/hlt/97-557/T405-eng.cfm?Lang=E&T=405&GH=4&GF=1&SC=1&S=1&O=D#FN5>
- Chen, A., & Kazanjian, A. (2002). Rate of mental health service utilization by Chinese immigrants in British Columbia. *Canadian Journal of Public Health / Revue canadienne de santé publique, 41*(1), 75–82.
- , A., & Kazanjian, A. (2009). Do primary care providers who speak Chinese improve access to mental health care of Chinese immigrants? *Open Medicine, 3*(1).
- Chen, A., Kazanjian, A., Wong, H., & Goldner, E. (2010). Mental health service use by Chinese immigrants with severe and persistent mental illness. *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry / Revue canadienne de psychiatrie, 55*(1), 35.
- Chen, A., Kazanjian, A., Wong, H., & Reid, R. (2009). Differences in mental health diagnoses between recent Chinese immigrants and a comparison population in British Columbia. *Healthcare Policy, 5*(2), 40–50.
- Chen, H., Kramer, E., Chen, T., Chen, J., & Chung, H. (2005). The Bridge Program: A model for delivering mental health services to Asian Americans through primary care. *AAPI Nexus: Asian Americans & Pacific Islanders Policy, Practice and Community, 3*(1), 13–29.
- Chen, H., Kramer, E.J., & Chen, T. (2003). The Bridge Program: A model for reaching Asian Americans. *Psychiatric Services, 54*(10), 1411–1412.
- Chen, S., Sullivan, N., Lu, Y., & Shibusawa, T. (2003). Asian Americans and mental health services: A study of utilization patterns in the 1990s. *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Social Work, 12*(2), 19–42.
- Chiu, M.Y.-L. (2004). Why Chinese women do not seek help: a cultural perspective on the psychology of women. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly, 17*(2), 155–166.
- Chung, H. (2002). The challenges of providing behavioral treatment to Asian Americans: Identifying the challenges is the first step in overcoming them. *Western Journal of Medicine, 176*(4), 222–223.
- Chung, R.C.-Y., & Bemak, F. (2002). Revisiting the California Southeast Asian Mental Health Needs Assessment data: An examination of refugee ethnic and gender differences. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 80*(1), 111.
- Cook, C.A.L., Becvar, D.S., & Pontious, S.L. (2000). Complementary alternative medicine in health and mental health: Implications for social work practice. *Social Work in Health Care, 31*(3), 39–57.
- Ergil, K., Kramer, E., & Ng, A. (2002). Chinese herbal medicines. *Western Journal of Medicine, 176*(4), 275–279.
- Fang, L., & Chen, T. (2004). Community outreach and education to deal with cultural resistance to mental health services. In N. Webb (Ed.), *Mass trauma and violence: Helping families and children cope* (pp. 234–255). New York: Guilford Press.
- Fang, L., & Schinke, S.P. (2007). Complementary alternative medicine use among Chinese Americans: Findings from a community mental health service population. *Psychiatric Services, 58*, 402–404.

- Flaskerud, J.H. (2007). Neurasthenia: Here and there, now and then. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing, 28*(6), 657–659.
- Fung, K., & Wong, Y.-L.R. (2007). Factors influencing attitudes towards seeking professional help among East and Southeast Asian immigrant and refugee women. *International Journal of Social Psychiatry, 53*(3), 216–231.
- Gaw, A.C. (1993). Psychiatric Care of Chinese Americans. In A.C. Gaw (Ed.), *Culture, Ethnicity, and Mental Illness* (pp. 245–280). Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association.
- Hsu, G., & Folstein, M. (1997). Somatoform disorders in Caucasian and Chinese Americans. *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease, 185*(6), 382–387.
- Hyman, I., & Guruge, S. (2002). A review of theory and health promotion strategies for new immigrant women. *Canadian Journal of Public Health / Revue canadienne de santé publique, 93*(3), 183–187.
- Kessler, R.C., McGonagle, K.A., Zhao, S., Nelson, C. B., Hughes, M., Eshleman, S., et al. (1994). Lifetime and 12-month prevalence of DSM-III-R psychiatric disorders in the United States: Results from the National Comorbidity Survey. *Archives of General Psychiatry, 51*(1), 8–19.
- Kleinman, A. (1975). *Explanatory models in health care relationships*. Article presented at the Health of the Family (National Council for International Health Symposium, Washington, D.C.
- . (1978). Concepts and a model for the comparison of medical systems as cultural systems. *Social Science and Medicine, 12*, 85–93.
- . (1981). *Patients and healers in the context of culture: An exploration of the borderland between anthropology, medicine, and psychiatry*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Kleinman, A., Anderson, J.M., Finkler, K., Frankenberg, R.J. & Young, A. (1986). Social origins of distress and disease: Depression, neurasthenia, and pain in modern China. *Current Anthropology, 24*(5), 499–509.
- Koss-Chioino, J.D. (2000). Traditional and folk approaches among ethnic minorities. *Psychological Intervention and Cultural Diversity* (2nd ed.). (pp. 149–166): Needham Heights, MA, US: Allyn & Bacon.
- Kramer, E., Kwong, K., Lee, E., & Chung, H. (2002). Cultural factors influencing the mental health of Asian Americans. *Western Journal of Medicine, 176*(4), 227.
- Kung, W.W. (2003). Chinese Americans' help seeking for emotional distress. *Social Service Review, 77*(1), 110–134.
- Kung, W.W., & Lu, P.-C. (2008). How symptom manifestations affect help seeking for mental health problems among Chinese Americans. *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease, 196*(1), 46–54.
- Lee, S. (1998). Estranged bodies, simulated harmony, and misplaced cultures: Neurasthenia in contemporary Chinese society. *Psychosomatic Medicine, 60*(4), 448–457.
- Leong, F.T.L. & Lau, A.S.L. (2001). Barriers to providing effective mental health services to Asian Americans. *Mental Health Services Research, 3*(4), 201–214.
- Lin, J.C.H. (1994). How long do Chinese Americans stay in psychotherapy? *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 41*, 288–291.
- Lin, K.-M. (1981). Traditional Chinese medical belief and their relevance for mental illness and psychiatry. In A. Kleiman & T. Y. Lin (Eds.), *Normal and Abnormal Behavior in Chinese Culture* (p. 95). Boston: D. Reidel.
- Lin, K.-M., & Cheung, F. (1999). Mental health issues for Asian Americans. *Psychiatric Services, 50*(6), 774–780.
- Lin, T., & Lin, M. (1981). Love, denial and rejection: Responses of Chinese families to mental illness. In A. Kleiman & T. Y. Lin (Eds.), *Normal and Abnormal Behavior in Chinese Culture* (pp. 387–401). Boston: D. Reidel.
- Ma, G.X. (1999). Between two worlds: The use of traditional and western health services by Chinese immigrants. *Journal of Community Health, 24*(6), 421–437.
- Matsuoka, J.K., Breaux, C., & Ryuji, D.H. (1997). National utilization of mental health services by Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders. *Journal of Community Psychology, 25*(2), 141–145.
- Milan, A., & Martel, L. (2008). Part I: Current demographic situation in Canada, 2005 and 2006. *Report on the demographic situation in Canada: 2005 and 2006*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada Demography Division.
- O'Mahony, J.M., & Donnelly, T.T. (2007). The influence of culture on immigrant women's mental health care experiences from the perspectives of health care providers. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing, 28*(5), 453–471.

Ritsner, M. & Ponizovsky, A. (1999). Psychological distress through immigration: The two-phase temporal pattern? *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, 45(2), 125–139.

Sadavoy, J., Meier, R. & Ong, A.Y.M. (2004). Barriers to access to mental health services for ethnic seniors: The Toronto study. *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry / Revue canadienne de psychiatrie*, 49(3), 192–199.

Schwartz, P. (2002). Why is neurasthenia important in Asian cultures? *Western Journal of Medicine*, 176(4), 257–258.

Snowden, L.R. & Cheung, F.K. (1990). Use of inpatient mental health services by members of ethnic minority groups. *American Psychologist*, 45(3), 347–355.

Spencer, M.S. & Chen, J. (2004). Effect of discrimination on mental health service utilization among Chinese Americans. *American Journal of Public Health*, 94(5), 809–814.

Sue, D. & Sue, S. (1987). Cultural factors in the clinical assessment of Asian Americans. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 55(4), 479–487.

Tang, T., Oatley, K. & Toner, B. (2007). Impact of life events and difficulties on the mental health of Chinese immigrant women. *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health*, 9(4), 281–290.

Tiwari, S.K. & Wang, J. (2008). Ethnic differences in mental health service use among White, Chinese, South Asian and South East Asian populations living in Canada. *Social Psychiatry & Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 43(11), 866–871.

Uba, L. (1994). Underuse of mental health services *Asian Americans: Personality Patterns, Identity, and Mental Health* (pp. 196–213). New York: Guilford Press.

van Ryn, M. & Fu, S.S. (2003). Paved with good intentions: Do public health and human service providers contribute to racial/ethnic disparities in health? *American Journal of Public Health*, 93(2), 248–255.

VandeCreek, L., Rogers, E. & Lester, J. (1999). Use of alternative therapies among breast cancer outpatients compared with the general population. *Alternative Therapies*, 5(1), 71–76.

Wong, O.N.C. (1998). *Silent voices, help-seeking patterns of recent immigrant chinese women from Hong Kong to Canada* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Toronto, Toronto.

World Health Organization. (1993). *The ICD-10 classification of mental and behavioural disorders: Diagnostic criteria for research*. Switzerland: Author.

Biographical notes

Lin Fang is an assistant professor at the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto. Her scholarly interests include culturally appropriate mental health assessments and treatment, mental health service utilization, the psychosocial adjustment of immigrant families, and substance use prevention among adolescents.

Are Current Employment Services Meeting the Needs of Immigrants?

A Recent Look*

Wendy Cukier · Katherine Jeffery · Margaret Yap · Lauren McDonald · Lennie Lejasisaks · Diversity Institute in Management and Technology, Ryerson University

Abstract

Based on recently collected data on labour market experiences of immigrants in a region of the Greater Toronto Area, this article explores the findings relating to employment service provision. Findings are presented by education level, gender, immigration category and age. Results show uniformly low job search satisfaction levels, but strategies, knowledge of employment services and unmet needs differ between most comparison groups.

Keywords: Immigrant · employment services · diversity

Quality of employment is a vital determinant of settlement and career experiences of immigrants (Canadian Council of Refugees, 1998). Employment services can provide immigrants with tools and advice that may help individuals identify and successfully apply for positions that match their skills and experience. By doing so, employment service providers can act as an important link between potential employers and individuals looking for employment, especially those who are new entrants to the Canadian labour market. The challenge today is in finding ways to provide services to immigrant populations whose employment needs are as varied as their demographic characteristics and individual backgrounds.

The objective of this article is to share the findings of a recently conducted immigrant labour market survey related to employment service provision. Findings are presented by education level, gender, immigration category and age.

Employment experiences of immigrants in Canada today

Since the 1990s, an overall shift in immigration policy in Canada has occurred. Where multiculturalism and family reunification used to dominate immigration discourses, today they seek to meet the goals of immigrant self-sufficiency and integration (Abu-Laban, 1998). However, most studies report that, despite increasing levels of education and experience, immigrants today are facing more barriers to employment, especially employment that offers financial stability and the opportunity to use and benefit from their acquired skills (Gilmore, 2009; Galarneau & Morrisette 2004; Aydemir & Skuterud, 2005; Wilkinson, Peter and Chaturvedi, 2006).

For many immigrants, finding and maintaining employment after immigration is a crucial component in establishing stability and security for oneself and one's family (Canadian Council for Refugees, 1998; George & Chaze,

2009). The literature on immigrant employment experiences in Canada has demonstrated the effects of gender (George & Ramkissoon, 1998; Ng, 2009; Mojab, 1999; Wilkinson, Peter and Chaturvedi, 2006; Man, 2004), immigration application category (Shields et al., 2010; Lamba, 2003; Wilkinson, 2008) and education level (Li, 2001; Statistics Canada, 2008), as well as age, although to a lesser extent (Wilkinson, 2008; Lamba 2003). This literature often emphasizes questions of employment and underemployment rates. Given the diverse challenges faced by immigrants in the job market today, the importance of timely, informed employment service provision is heightened for immigrants (George & Chaze, 2009). Studies examining the job search experiences of immigrants reveal that while some immigrants experience more challenges than others, searching for work in Canada is a process fraught with barriers on the individual, structural and systemic levels (Oreopoulos, 2009; Bauder, 2003; Geddie 2002), resulting in inequitable labour market outcomes. Shields et al. (2010) report that men and principal applicants in the skilled worker category spent less time looking for work, whereas women and refugees experience longer search times. They also found, however, that jobs were only modestly matched with the individual's training and experience, regardless of immigration category, even as the individual spent more time in Canada.

While the provision of employment-related services is of vital importance for immigrants searching for employment in Canada and immigrant integration and settlement is the focus of interest for many academic, government and community organizations, the literature indicates that structural and systemic factors impede the delivery of these services and the potential benefits they could deliver to individuals. One issue with current employment services is that employment counselling and assistance geared specifically towards immigrants is often structured, along with other settlement services, to assist immigrants in the

initial phases of settlement without addressing medium- or long-term settlement needs (Omidvar & Richmond, 2003; Lee, 1999). Other issues include the need for culturally appropriate or competent service provision (Bernard & Moriah, 2007; Graham, Bradshaw & Trew, 2009), although this body of research has been critiqued for the ways in which it assumes that the social worker is part of the dominant culture (Sakamoto, 2007).

The provision of employment services to immigrants has not been able to fully address the needs of this group, resulting in higher levels of unemployment and underemployment.

Another challenge of contemporary service provision to immigrants is the prevalence of stereotypes and cultural assumptions leading to misinformation among service providers, their funders and employers who recruit through agencies (Bauder, 2003; Graham, Bradshaw & Trew, 2009; Donkor, 2004; Ng 1996; Oreopoulos, 2009; Lee, 1999). These perceptions had implications for the kind of assistance provided, thereby potentially limiting an individual's opportunities based on their ascribed characteristics. A one-size-fits-all approach to employment services leaves many labour market requirements unmet (Lee, 1999).

Other studies identify the pressures brought on by recent funding models that prioritize shortening periods of unemployment regardless of the quality or suitability of the position. Sometimes termed "survival" employment (Geddie 2002; Creese & Wiebe, 2009), this strategy can lead to underemployment and

gendered and racialized labour segmentation (Creese & Wiebe, 2009), with negative or limiting effects on long-term labour market experiences (Wilkenson, Peter & Chaturvedi, 2006; Li, Gervais & Duval, 2006; Mitchell, Lightman & Herd, 2007).

In summary, employment services play an important role in generating labour market success, especially for immigrants. However, for a variety of reasons, the provision of employment services to immigrants has not been able to fully address the needs of this group, resulting in higher levels of unemployment and underemployment. It is hoped that the findings presented below will begin to illuminate areas where further consideration is needed.

Methodology

Our data was collected between January and April 2009 in Peel, a region in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). A total of 1,425 surveys were completed by respondents living in the region, aged 15 and older, who had worked or searched for work in the previous 10 years. Surveys were completed in both paper and electronic format, with the majority being completed electronically. Peel’s population is composed of a high percentage of immigrants

(48.6%), many of whom arrived in Canada within the last 20 years (Region of Peel, 2009). Of the most recently arrived immigrants (those who immigrated between 2001 and 2006), 60.5% were born in South or Southeast Asia. (Social Planning Council of Peel, 2009).

Our study took place during the height of the recent economic recession. Between October 2008 and October 2009, the employment rate in Canada declined by 2.3%, while the unemployment rate rose from 6.3% to 8.6% (Statistics Canada, 2009). Research shows that young people, low-income workers, families with young children and recent immigrants of core working age were among those who experienced the highest rate of employment loss during this time (Statistics Canada, 2009). During the recessionary period, the employment rate of recent immigrants dropped rapidly by 12.9%, compared with a much smaller decline (2.2%) among Canadian-born workers (Statistics Canada, 2009).

Sample description

Of the 1,425 survey respondents, 795 were immigrant respondents who provided information on their gender, age, education level and immigration category. See Table 1

Table 1
Sample characteristics (n=795)

		n	% of sample
Gender	Male	485	61.0
	Female	310	39.0
Age	< 30 years old	229	28.8
	≥ 30 years old	566	71.2
Education	Less than bachelor’s degree	139	17.5
	Bachelor’s degree and above	656	82.5
Immigration category	Principal applicant skilled worker	297	37.4
	All others	498	62.6

for a sample description. Of these 795 respondents, 61.0% identified as female and 17.5% being less than 30 years old (“youth” is defined by the Government of Canada (2009) as individuals under 30 years of age). Most respondents (62.6%) had completed a bachelor’s degree or higher, and 28.8% identified immigrating under the principal applicant skilled worker category.

During the recessionary period, the employment rate of recent immigrants dropped rapidly by 12.9%, compared with a much smaller decline (2.2%) among Canadian-born workers.

Findings

Overall satisfaction with job search

To measure overall job search satisfaction, a scale out of 100 was created from four Likert scale items (Cronbach’s Alpha=0.789). Sample items included: “I am satisfied with my job searching experiences in Canada” and “I am satisfied with the quality of support that I have received from community organizations in finding a job.” All sample groupings reported low job search satisfaction levels, ranging from 45 to 50 out of 100 on the scale. There were no statistically significant differences between groups in our sample.

Job search strategies

Respondents were asked to select all of the job search strategies they had used from a comprehensive list. Findings relevant to this article focused on the use of service agencies and other formal employment services. Men

were only slightly more likely than women to use these strategies, with differences especially apparent in the use of recruitment firms and employment agencies by men (33% of men vs. 25% of women). Findings also indicate that respondents aged 30 years or older are much more likely to use these strategies, when compared to respondents under the age of 30. For instance, only 28% of the younger group reported visiting government or community agencies and 22% reported attending courses or seminars on finding a job, compared with 43% and 49% of the older group, respectively. Furthermore, immigrants with a university degree reported using these strategies more than immigrants without a university degree. Specifically, 46% of immigrants with at least a university degree visited government or community agencies, while only 30% of immigrants without a bachelor’s degree used this strategy. Also, individuals who immigrated under the principal applicant skilled worker category were much more likely to use employment service strategies, compared with individuals immigrating under all other categories. The greatest difference (23%) in use of an individual strategy was seen for the strategy “Attended courses or seminars on finding a job.” A total of 61% of principal applicant skilled workers identified using this strategy, compared with 37% of all other immigrants.

Knowing where to go

Pearson chi-square tests of significance were performed within the categories of respondents with respect to the question, “Do you know where to go for help for job services in the Region of Peel?” A majority of men (66.3%) and women (60.7%) identified knowing where to go, and there were no significant differences ($\chi^2=2.479$, d.f. =1) between gender groupings. Similar numbers were reported for the those with less than a bachelor’s degree (65.4%) and those with a bachelor’s degree and above (63.4%), again with no significant difference ($\chi^2=0.303$, d.f.=1). However, when grouped by immigration status category, responses

Table 2
Employment help needed but not received,
by gender, education level, immigrant category and age (%*)

		Advice/counseling	Job search	Information	Financial help	Legal help	Transportation	Child care	Language help (e.g., translation, interpretation)	Other
Gender	Male	29.6	35.9	33.1	33.1	9.2	11.3	7.7	7.0	20.4
	Female	32.0	31.1	27.2	30.6	4.9	14.1	11.7	6.8	19.4
Education	Less than Bachelor's degree	29.2	35.4	22.1	46.9	6.2	23.0	10.6	8.8	6.2
	Bachelors degree and above	31.9	31.9	33.2	24.3	6.8	8.1	9.8	6.0	26.4
Immigration category	Principal applicant skilled worker	31.7	34.2	35.0	27.5	3.3	6.7	12.5	4.2	30.0
	All others	30.7	32.5	26.8	33.8	8.3	16.2	8.8	8.3	14.5
Age	< 30 years old	26.0	42.0	32.0	34.0	6.0	28.0	8.0	6.0	2.0
	≥ 30 years old	31.9	31.5	29.2	31.2	6.7	10.4	10.4	7.0	22.8

*Percentages based on only those who identified not having received help they needed.

showed a statistically significant difference ($\chi^2=4.247$, $d.f.=1$, $p\leq 0.05$): a higher percentages of principal applicants in the skilled worker category (69.6%) reported knowing where to go, compared with 61.8% of all other immigrants. A greater difference was found between respondents grouped by age: only 51.5% of respondents under the age of 30 said they knew where to go for job services in Peel, while 66.7% of those 30 years of age and over acknowledged they knew where to go ($\chi^2=10.975$, $d.f.=1$, $p\leq 0.001$).

Help needed but not received

Pearson chi-square tests of significance were also performed within the categories of respondents for the question, "Was there any kind of help you needed but did not receive?" There proved to be no significant difference ($\chi^2=0.379$, $d.f.=1$) between the genders: 48.0% of males and 45.7% of females responded "Yes." However, there was a small

but significant difference within the education category ($\chi^2=4.085$, $d.f.=1$, $p\leq 0.05$): 41.7% of respondents with below a bachelor's degree said they needed help but did not receive it, while 49.4% of respondents with a bachelor's degree or higher responded in the affirmative. The greatest difference occurred within the immigration status grouping ($\chi^2=6.670$, $d.f.=1$, $p\leq 0.01$): 53.8% of principal applicant skilled workers said they needed help but did not receive it, while only 43.5% of all other immigrants responded this way. The difference found between age groupings (39.4% of those under 30 years of age and 48.1% of those 30 years of age or older reported needing but not receiving help) was not significant ($\chi^2=3.202$, $d.f.=1$).

Respondents who identified needing but not receiving help were then asked, "What kind of help did you need but not receive?," with the respondents being asked to check all items that applied to them (See Table 2).

The most common kinds of job search help needed but not received were advice/counselling, job search, information and financial help. The greatest differences (over 10%) were seen in the area of "transportation" requirements when comparing between education levels, immigration category and age groups; in the area of "information" needs when comparing between education groups and in the area of "job search" assistance when comparing between age groups. Differences between gender groups were consistently small.

The most common kinds of job search help needed but not received were advice/counselling, job search, information and financial help. The greatest differences (over 10%) were seen in the area of "transportation" requirements.

using employment services as a job search strategy more often than immigrant women. This is reflected in the literature that identifies the need for improving both access to (Donkor, 1998) and content of (Lee, 1999) employment services for immigrant women. Addressing the unmet needs of immigrant men and women will necessitate taking into consideration the differences in strategies used by each group and conducting further exploration of the structural and systemic reasons behind these differences.

Education level

Results indicate that immigrants with bachelor's degrees or higher are more likely to make use of employment services than those without; however, also significantly, they more likely to report that they did not receive the help they needed. Specifically, they were more likely to identify "information" assistance as help they needed but did not receive. These findings suggest that the employment needs of immigrants with higher levels of education are not being met by employment services despite increased levels of use. This pattern mirrors the well-documented challenges experienced by immigrants with higher levels of education seeking employment (Mojab, 1999; Geddie, 2002). This has implications for those interested in decreasing the rates of under-employment of immigrants in the Canadian labour market.

Discussion

The purpose of this article was to examine the job-search satisfaction levels of immigrants and some of their experiences using employment services. Findings considered relevant to employment service provision were reported based on groupings by gender, age, education level and immigrant category.

Gender

Overall, there was no significant difference between men and women in job search satisfaction nor in respondents needing but not receiving help. Furthermore, while both groups reported similar levels of knowledge of available services, immigrant men reported

Immigration category

Principal applicants in the skilled worker category are much more likely than immigrants in all other categories to know where to go for job search services and to use employment services when searching for a job. However, they are also significantly more likely to report not receiving the help they need. The lack of adequate employment services geared specifically to the needs of this skilled group may be part of the reason for the under-employment and barriers to

integration faced by many immigrants brought to Canada for their skills and experience.

Age

Once again, while levels of job search satisfaction were similarly low, results for immigrants under 30 years of age and those 30 years of age or more show that experiences are quite distinct between these groups. Older immigrants in our sample were much more likely to use employment services, perhaps because they were also more likely to report knowing where to go for assistance. Furthermore, areas of unmet needs were different. High levels of unemployment faced by youth in recent years (Statistics Canada, 2009) indicate the pressing need for greater dissemination of information on employment services to younger labour market participants.

Immigrants with bachelor’s degrees or higher are more likely to make use of employment services than those without; however, also significantly, they more likely to report that they did not receive the help the needed.

sample would have enabled an analysis of the relationship between service provision and employment outcomes. However, the findings do provide recent data on immigrant job search satisfaction levels, collected during a time of economic recession in a region where nearly half the population is composed of immigrants.

Results suggest that there is an opportunity for employment services to begin to mediate the high unemployment and under-employment rates of immigrants in a more specific and accountable way. The unmet need of those with higher levels of education and younger immigrants reinforces the call for a more targeted approach to employment services for immigrants. The low levels of satisfaction with services provided suggest unmet needs. Other qualitative research (the Region of Peel and the Diversity Institute, 2009) associated with the project, highlighted the challenges associated with finding appropriate services, fragmentation of services and availability of customized services. As unemployment and underemployment among immigrants is associated with a host of other forms of social exclusion and often results in greater demand for other health and social services, the benefits of an integrated, cross-sectoral approach would seem obvious.

As well, our findings are consistent with other studies suggesting that more integration and cross-referencing of services are needed. Social workers in a range of service areas may be dealing with one symptom of a problem that affects the whole family and, regardless of their specific agency and service area, ought to be aware of employment-related programs in their region. Recently, the United Way of Peel Region has launched a coordinated newcomer strategy cutting across 12 different service providers, and the Region of Peel has launched a new portal in an effort to provide one-stop shopping, at least for those who have English and Internet literacy skills (www.immigration.peel.ca/index.asp). Among the services provided are job search workshops, career planning programs for internationally trained

Conclusion

This article was intended to share the recently collected data on key immigrant labour market experiences relating to employment service provision. Overall, the study was limited due to sampling methods, which did not procure a sample representative of the regional population. Furthermore, the data did not permit analysis of how experiences differ with the passage of time in Canada. Finally, a larger

professionals, the job-connect program, a mentoring program, bridging skills training programs, internship–career bridging programs, enhanced language training and specialty ESL classes and volunteer opportunities. More research is needed to assess the impact of these specific programs as well as user satisfaction levels in order to provide new immigrants with a full range of opportunities.

References

- Abu-Laban, Y. (1998). Welcome/STAY OUT: The contradiction of Canadian integration and immigration policies at the millennium (n1). *Canadian Ethnic Studies / Études ethniques au Canada*, 30(3), 190–211.
- Aydemir, A., & Skuterud, M. (2005). Explaining the deteriorating entry earnings of Canada's immigrant cohorts, 1966–2000. *Canadian Journal of Economics / Revue canadienne d'économique*, 38(2), 641–671.
- Bauder, H. (2003). Cultural representations of immigrant workers by service providers and employers. *Journal of International Migration and Immigration / Revue de l'intégration et de la migration internationale*, 4(3), 415–438.
- Bernard, W.T., & Moriah, J. (2007). Cultural competency an individual or institutional responsibility? *Canadian Social Work Review / Revue canadienne de service social*, 24(1), 81–92.
- Boyd, M., & Thomas, D. (2001). Match or mismatch? The employment of immigrant engineers in Canada's labour force. *Population Research and Policy Review*, 20, 107–133.
- Canada. Government of Canada. (2009). *Youth employment strategy (YES)*. Retrieved from <http://www.youth.gc.ca/eng/common/yes.shtml>.
- . Statistics Canada. (2009). *Study: Canada's employment downturn*. Retrieved from www.statcan.gc.ca/dailyquotidien/091112/dq091112aeng.htm
- . Statistics Canada. (2008). *Study: Canadian immigrant labour market: Analysis by region of highest postsecondary education*. Retrieved from www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/080718/dq080718b-eng.htm
- Canadian Council for Refugees. (1998). *Best settlement practices: Settlement services for refugees and immigrants in Canada*. Montréal, QC.
- Creese, G., & Wiebe, B. (20 July 2009). 'Survival employment': Gender and deskilling among African immigrants in Canada. *International Migration*. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2435.2009.00531.x.
- Galameau, D., & Morissette, R. (2004). Immigrants: Settling for less? *Perspectives on labour and income*, 16(3), 5–16.
- Geddie, K. (2002). *License to labour: Obstacles facing Vancouver's foreign-trained engineers*. RIMM Working Paper #02–21. Retrieved from <http://mbc.metropolis.net/assets/uploads/files/wp/2002/WP02-21.pdf>
- George, U., & Ramkissoon, S. (1998). Race, gender, and class: Interlocking oppressions in the lives of South Asian women in Canada. *Affilia*, 13(1), 102–119.
- George, U., & Chaze, F. (2009). Social capital and employment: South Asian women's experiences. *Journal of Women and Social Work*, 24(4), 394–405.
- Gilmore, J. (2009). *The immigrant labour force analysis series: The 2008 Canadian immigrant labour market: Analysis of quality employment* (Cat. No. 71-606-X, no. 5). Ottawa: Statistics Canada.
- Graham, J.R., Bradshaw, C., & Trew, J.L. (2009). Addressing cultural barriers with Muslim clients: An agency perspective. *Administration in Social Work*, 33(4), 387–406.
- Lamba, N.K. (2003). The employment experiences of Canadian refugees: Measuring the impact of human and social capital on quality of employment. *The Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, 40(1), 45–75.
- Lee, J. (1999). *Immigrant settlement and multiculturalism programs for immigrant, refugee and visible minority women: A study of outcomes, best practices and issues*. Retrieved from http://jo-annelee.com/documents/immigrant_settlementj_lee_final_report.pdf
- Li, C., Ginette, G., & Duval, A. (2006). *The dynamics of over qualification: Canada's underemployed university graduates* (Cat. No. 11-621-MIE — No. 039). Ottawa: Statistics Canada.
- Li, P.S. (2001). The market worth of immigrants' educational credentials. *Canadian Public Policy*, 27(1), 23–38.
- Mitchell, A., Lightman, E., & Herd, D. (2007). 'Work first' and immigrants in Toronto. *Social Policy and Society*, 6(3), 293–307.

Ng, R. (1996). *The politics of community services: Immigrant women, class and state* (2nd ed.). Halifax: Fernwood Publishing.

Omidvar, R., & Richmond, T. (2003). *Immigrant settlement and social inclusion in Canada*. Working Paper Series Perspectives on Social Inclusion. Toronto: The Laidlaw Foundation.

The Region of Peel and The Diversity Institute. (2009). *The Peel Immigration Labour Market Survey Findings*. Retrieved from www.ryerson.ca/diversity/resources/FINAL_PeelReport_2010March3.pdf

Sakamoto, I. (2007). An anti-oppressive approach to cultural competence. *Canadian Social Work Review*, 24(1), 105–114.

Shields, J., Phan, M., Yang, F., Kelly, P., Lemoine, M., Lo, L., Preston, B. and Tufts, S. (2010). *TEIDI analytical report 2: Do immigrant class and gender affect labour market outcomes for immigrants?* Toronto: Toronto Immigrant Employment Data Initiative.

Simich, L., Beiser, M., Stewart, M. and Mwakarimba, E. (2005). Providing social support for immigrants and refugees in Canada: Challenges and directions. *Journal of Immigrant Health*, 7(4), 259–268.

The Social Planning Council of Peel. (2008). *Immigration & Language: Peel Region, 2006*. Retrieved from www.spcpeel.com/diversity%20Peel%202006.pdf

Biographical notes

Wendy Cukier, MA, MBA, PhD, DU (HC), LLD (HC), MSC, is associate dean, academic, of the Ted Rogers School of Management at Ryerson University. She has gained extensive experience as a consultant specializing in strategy and organizational change. She has written more than 200 papers on technology, innovation and management and is co-author of the bestseller, *Innovation Nation: from Java to Jurassic Park*. She founded the Diversity Institute in 1999, which focuses on women and technology.

Note

* Data for the article are proprietary and collected as part of a collaborative research project between the Region of Peel and the Diversity Institute in Management and Technology at Ryerson University. Funds were generously provided by the Government of Ontario.

A Place-based Approach to Social Integration

How a Neighbourhood House Works with Newcomers

Karen Larcombe · Miu Chung Yan

Abstract

The concept of Neighbourhood Houses (NH) in Canada's urban centres was inherited from England's Settlement House Movement of the late 19th century, which employed what were, at the time, innovative approaches to helping newcomers integrate into their new communities. The current NHs, which share their settlement house roots with the development of the social work profession, have historically upheld the principles of social justice, and the traditions of community building. When meeting the needs of newcomers, NHs have always tried to connect them with other residents, to identify and nurture leadership among them, and to develop their sense of ownership. Recognizing that all NHs are different, this article tells the story of how one particular neighbourhood house works with newcomers in Vancouver's Southeast area. This story offers a snapshot of the contributions made by NHs in helping newcomers to Canada—most of whom face daunting challenges as they attempt to settle into their new milieu, and eventually integrate into Canadian society. We argue that as place-based, neighbourhood-focused, multiservice organizations, NHs constitute a primary infrastructure (along with other organizations and government services) for helping immigrants integrate. Before concluding, we highlight some policy implications for the social work profession.

Keywords: Neighbourhood houses · social work · newcomers · immigrants · settlement

Community practice in social work can be traced back to the historical roots of the Settlement House Movement in England (Fisher, 2005). Inspired by the success of Toynbee Hall, the first settlement house, which was established in East London in 1884, settlement houses were set up in urban neighbourhoods in Canada in the late 1880s, with the aim of serving new immigrants (Heinonen & Spearman, 2010; Irving, Parsons & Bellamy, 1995). The success of the approach in helping people and building communities has been documented and recognized.

Recently, some political scientists have proposed the idea of “bringing back the

settlement house tradition” (Husock, 1993). The Canadian Settlement House Movement, which is an inseparable part of the history of immigration in this country, has now been succeeded by a number of place-based, locally governed organizations that are often referred to as neighbourhood houses (NHs). Established at different times, most of these houses were created by local residents wishing to serve the needs of their communities (Irving, et al., 1995; James, 2001; Sandercock & Attili, 2009).

Although differing in many respects from the early settlement houses, contemporary NHs have inherited many of their characteristics,

such as being place-based and locally governed. They also tend to have humanistic and democratic values, a holistic view of human needs, and the flexibility to deliver multiple services and help with community building (Yan, 2004). Espousing the principles of community social work, NHs actively work to strengthen communal life, build social cohesion, and ensure inclusiveness, meaningful participation, democratic decision making, and relationships based on trust and reciprocity. This goal is reflected in the Association of Neighbourhood Houses of British Columbia's (ANH) mission statement: "To enable people to enhance their lives and strengthen their communities" (see <http://www.anhgv.org/about/mission.php>). Contemporary NHs face many challenges, the most crucial of which is their dependence on government funding (Fabricant & Fisher, 2002; Koerin, 2003). Despite these challenges, researchers found that NHs still actively engage in community-building activities in neighbourhoods with high concentrations of immigrants (Yan, Lauer & Sin, 2009).

Espousing the principles of community social work, NHs actively work to strengthen communal life, build social cohesion, and ensure inclusiveness, meaningful participation, democratic decision making, and relationships based on trust and reciprocity.

These activities are particularly important when serving newcomers whose most daunting challenges are to integrate into Canadian society. The process from settlement to

integration is a long one, and due to funding limitations, most settlement services are geared only toward the first three to five years. Arguably, the best way to help immigrants over the long term is through an integrated approach that coordinates the activities of different organizations: specialists in immigrant and refugee services, multiservice community groups, and government services (Thomson, 2008). Since NHs are place-based organizations with a unique neighbourhood focus, they play a key role both in serving newcomers, and also in helping them to build connections with other cultural groups (Yan & Lauer, 2008). Because they offer a one-stop destination for information, services, cultural events, and community involvement, NHs are better able to address newcomers' needs—both practical needs such as where to find childcare, and social needs such as community bonding. And because community building is embedded in their approach, NHs are able to develop two-way relationships with participants: when the time is right, newcomers are encouraged to contribute their skills and abilities, and grow as part of the community.

Since every individual NH is different, we recognize that any generalized description of how they operate may minimize the unique experience they represent. In this article, therefore, we focus on the story of one particular neighbourhood house, located in Vancouver's south-east area. An illustration of how it serves newcomers, and helps them to integrate into the community, reflects the persistent efforts of NHs to achieve their community-building mission.

South Vancouver Neighbourhood House (SVNH)

This settlement in the Fraserview neighbourhood was started when a group of residents formed the Fraserview Action Society. The neighbourhood has traditionally been a first choice for newcomers: according to the 2006 census, 65.5% of residents

living there (in the scale of a census tract) are immigrants. The Society joined the ANH in 1977, and became a neighbourhood house. The grassroots foundation and governance of SVNH have remained as strong principles guiding the organization's development, and the house's values reflect community diversity in its board, staff, and programs. The locally elected governance board sets program and budget priorities, and all board members are actively involved in their neighbourhoods. An annual review of programs and planning takes participant feedback into account.

SVNH acts as a local hub for individual and social change, providing services, community action, and social integration for families and individuals—people of all ages, races, cultures, social classes, abilities, and sexual orientations.

SVNH is actively engaged with other grassroots community movements, and has built a strong relationship with local partners and funders. Today, like many NHs in Canada, its existence depends on funding from the city, the province, and the federal government; and it relies on these sources as well as on the United Way, charitable foundations, its own fundraising enterprises, and service fees charged for unfunded programs such as child-care. Together, these create a patchwork annual budget of \$3.4 million.

A welcoming and inclusive space

SVNH prides itself on functioning as a community living room, where residents

can drop in, feel at home and experience informal, cross-cultural, and cross-generational connections. A typical morning scene in the lobby might present two young Latin-American mothers sitting and talking, while their children attend preschool upstairs. Their babies, sleeping in strollers by their sides, are admired by the seniors arriving for their wellness activities. The mothers take turns chatting with the Spanish-speaking receptionist, who offers a friendly ear and helps to connect them with the information and services they need.

SVNH acts as a local hub for individual and social change, providing services, community action, and social integration for families and individuals—people of all ages, races, cultures, social classes, abilities, and sexual orientations. The values of social work are put into action here, facilitating the participation of marginalized groups in the local community. The house plays a bridging role, both by helping newcomers to connect with community activities, and by engaging long-time residents in community projects. For example, when a group of residents at a nearby community formed a new initiative to address local issues, SVNH offered them support and training as part of its community capacity-building approach. SVNH also reaches out to newcomers and engages them in projects such as neighbourhood mapping and local improvements, in order to build a more welcoming and inclusive community (Larcombe, 2008). By incorporating these principles into its program design, SVNH is able to connect groups of people and meet individuals' service needs. To highlight the work of helping newcomers and building community, we present three examples of its work: the family support program, the dialogue circles project, and local leadership development.

The Family Support Program

In Vancouver, most newcomer participants using NHs are women with young children (Yan & Lauer, 2008), who arrive in Canada with few family or social contacts. To respond

to this need, SVNH offers a family support program to both newcomers and long-time residents. This includes one-on-one supports such as providing information and referrals, settlement counselling, domestic violence counselling, outreach for isolated parents, and practical supports such as helping newcomers with grocery shopping, or accompanying them to a doctor. These services are delivered both in English, and in the main languages used in the neighbourhood: Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu, Cantonese, Mandarin, Vietnamese, and Korean. Also offered are group-based programs such as ESL classes, parenting education groups, pre-school programs, and family drop-in programs. These groups, which often include child minding, not only help parents and grandparents to acquire the skills and knowledge needed to raise a family in Canada, they also help them to meet their neighbours, and to develop mutual support networks.

Newcomers often live in crowded conditions, and must struggle to make ends meet, so they often do not have the resources for entertainment. SVNH activities, such as celebrating cultural occasions, offer a welcome break from the stresses of home, and also allow newcomers to enjoy being with their own family, and to meet other families with children. For example, a December 2009 family event brought together Jarai refugees from the hills of Vietnam, recent immigrants from China, and other neighbourhood residents from different parts of the world. Through these activities, residents of different ethnicities can engage in cultural exchanges, and establish relationships with one another: the NH provides a safe and respectful point of first contact. Since the families live in the same neighbourhood, they can further develop their connections while shopping and visiting the parks.

Dialogue circles: Building community ties and solidarity

Although the concept of social integration is contestable, it is generally believed that

for newcomers to better integrate into the host society, they need functional social networks beyond the close ties of family and friends from the same ethnic group. Social connections with staff and other members of NHs can be useful for finding work and integrating into the larger society, as indicated in a recent study (Yan & Lauer, 2008). Recognizing this need, SVNH has experimented with the idea of dialogue circles. Inspired by the traditional concept of the neighbourhood “welcome wagon” visit, these are intended to encourage settled residents to connect with newcomers. The objective is for participants to develop new friendships, learn from each other, and gain a sense of community.

SVNH dialogue circles are held in various community locations where people gather, such as public libraries, community centres, schools, and social housing complexes. At these events, the facilitator first welcomes the participants, then invites them to share a story on the subject of how to make neighbourhoods welcoming. This “appreciative inquiry” approach encourages people to share their vision for a positive neighbourhood life. This is followed by a group discussion to generate ideas about inclusiveness, and sometimes guest speakers broaden the discussion. For example, when the theme of a safe community was identified, the community policing office was invited to the next meeting. The group learned about the role of policing, and about safety programs such as “block watch.” Another time, when the circle discussed the idea of a racism-free neighbourhood, a group of youth trained by SVNH to deliver anti-racism workshops was invited.

Nurturing leadership: Fostering ownership

As part of its community-building tradition, SVNH focuses on identifying and nurturing leadership among newcomers — a quality that is a critical indicator of social integration. For example, a South Asian mother who attended

the dialogue circle at a local elementary school was initially very shy about sharing her ideas. However, after several weeks she volunteered to help with Punjabi translation for some South Asian grandparents who had joined the circle. The facilitator encouraged her to take greater leadership, eventually providing her with facilitation training. Now the mother leads one of the dialogue circles herself.

Another example: a group of Mandarin-speaking grandparents attending the family drop-in program were identified as having particular needs, as immigrant grandparents, and the family worker invited them to discuss their situation. With some initial help from the facilitator, the seniors developed a group program that met their own needs and those of others like them. That program now runs weekly under its own steam. Based on this experience, SVNH designed a toolkit and a program model, to guide volunteers in running their own groups.

Conclusion

The story of SVNH may be typical: it shares characteristics with other Vancouver NHs (Sandercock & Attili, 2009), and with many other similar establishments in Canada. As place-based multiservice organizations, NHs offer alternatives for social integration policy and programs—an idea that has drawn some interest in Canada (Bradford, 2005; Ross & Dunn, 2007). In essence, place-based policy can be understood as a bottom-up approach that focuses on social infrastructures and on networks of democratic participation. As Amin (2002) suggests, efforts to build ethnoracially diverse communities require an increase in intercultural understanding and interaction; and this is best accomplished through mediated opportunities that go beyond mere physical proximity. As an inclusive and welcoming hub of services, NHs like SVNH are a natural “micro-public” (Amin, 2002) that provide a social venue for ethnically diverse people to meet each other. Located in

established neighbourhoods, NHs are accessible to newcomers who, very often, are isolated due to their lack of social networks, knowledge of the city, and means of transportation. Through initiatives like the family support program and the dialogue circle, NHs meet people’s needs, help them to connect with others, and nurture leadership.

Historically, NHs and social work are linked through a shared heritage of settlement houses. Indeed, the history of settlement houses in Canada was closely tied to the early development of the profession of social work (Heinonen & Spearman, 2010; Irving, et al., 1995). However, the connection has recently been loosened, due primarily to the desire for professional standing among social-work graduates, and to the NHs’ relative lack of funding to recruit social workers in a competitive marketplace. In view of the growing number of immigrants in Canadian society, the profession has an obligation to provide services for newcomers that go beyond the merely remedial settings of hospitals, family services, and child protection. Since most immigrants are tied to their neighbourhoods, social workers should take a proactive approach: they should connect and work with these place-based service organizations in urban neighbourhoods, such as NHs, community health centres, and family resource centres.

There are many ways for social workers to reconnect with our roots in the Settlement House movement. For instance, we can engage with NH practitioners in exchanging our knowledge and experience of working with newcomers, both in the classroom and in the field through presentations and practicum respectively. Social work researchers can also partner with NHs to conduct community-based research on issues important to newcomers, or else volunteer at NHs in different capacities to serve newcomers directly.

To conclude, the story of the South Vancouver Neighbourhood House tells us that this kind of place-based neighbourhood and multiservice organization can be an important part of our social infrastructure, one with a special role to

play in helping newcomers integrate. Sharing the same heritage as the social work profession, NHs are not only a service mechanism; they are also a community-building agent. While helping immigrants to settle in, the NHs also connect them with other residents, nurture their leadership skills, and build a sense of ownership in the community. Through this process, newcomers become members of the neighbourhood.

References

- Amin, A. (2002). Ethnicity and the multicultural city: Living with diversity. *Environment and Planning, 34*, 959–980.
- Bradford, N. (2005). *Place-based Public Policy: Towards a New Urban and Community Agenda for Canada* (No. F51).
- Fabricant, M.B., & Fisher, R. (2002). *Settlement Houses Under Siege: The Struggle to Sustain Community Organization in New York City*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Fisher, R. (2005). History, context, and emerging issues for community practice. In M. Weil (Ed.), *The Handbook of Community Practice* (pp. 34–58). Thousand Oaks, London and New Delhi: SAGE.
- Heinonen, T., & Spearman, L. (2010). *Social Work Practice: Problem Solving and Beyond* (3rd ed.). Toronto, ON: Nelson Education Ltd.
- Husock, H. (1993). Bring back the settlement house: Settlements see poor people as citizens, not clients. *Public welfare, 51*(4), 16–25.
- Irving, A., Parsons, H., & Bellamy, D. (Eds.). (1995). *Neighbours: Three Social Settlements in Downtown Toronto*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press.
- James, C. (2001). Reforming reform: Toronto's settlement house movement 1900–20. *The Canadian Historical Review, 82*(1), 55–90.
- Koerin, B. (2003). The settlement house tradition: Current trends and future concern. *Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare, 30*(2), 53–68.
- Larcombe, K. (2008). *Community capacity building: a role for neighbourhood houses in community revitalization*. University of British Columbia, Vancouver.
- Ross, N., & Dunn, J. (2007). *Canadian Neighbourhoods, Social Exclusion and Place-based Policy Prescriptions—An Overview* (No. SP-642-03-07E). Ottawa: Human Resources and Skills Development Canada.
- Sandercock, L., & Attili, G. (2009). *Where Strangers Become Neighbours: Integrating Immigrants in Vancouver, Canada*. New York, NY: Springer.
- Thomson, M. (2008). *Negotiating the slippery slope of capacity building: A world cafe discussion summary report*. Vancouver, BC: Social Planning and Research Council of BC & Vountary Organizations Consortium of BC.
- Yan, M.C. (2004). Bridging the fragmented community: Revitalizing settlement houses in the global era. *Journal of Community Practice, 12*(1/2), 51–69.
- Yan, M.C., & Lauer, S. (2008). Social capital and ethnocultural diverse immigrants: A Canadian study on settlement house and social integration. *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Social Work, 17*(3), 229–250.
- Yan, M.C., Lauer, S., & Sin, R. (2009). Issues in Community (Re)building: The Tasks of Settlement Houses in Two Cities. *Social Development Issues, 31*(1), 39–54.

Bibliographical notes

Karen Larcombe has been working in community social work for 22 years. As the executive director of a neighbourhood house, she is a strong advocate for strengthening urban neighbourhoods as places of support, connection and social integration.

Miu Chung Yan is an associate professor at the University of British Columbia. His major research areas include place-based multiservice organizations, immigrant settlement and integration, youth from immigrant family, cross-cultural and antiracist social work practice.

Growing New Roots

The Housing Experiences of Racialized Newcomers in a Second-tier Canadian City*

Uzo Anucha • Alexander Lovell • Daphne Jeyapal

Abstract

Canadian immigration policy encourages the settlement of new immigrants into smaller, “second-tier” cities based on the assumption that such cities may foster better settlement outcomes than major immigration gateways like Toronto, Montréal and Vancouver. In Ontario, Windsor–Essex is among the fastest growing second-tier destinations for newcomers. This article explores the housing situation of recent newcomers to Windsor–Essex by drawing on qualitative interviews with 20 racialized newcomers purposively selected from 204 participants that participated in a larger housing survey. The interviews highlighted their housing experiences and the processes that facilitated or hindered their access to housing. Despite participants’ diverse backgrounds, five common themes emerged around their housing and settlement stories: participants chose to settle in Windsor as a survival strategy; pre-migration housing experience is a frame for understanding post-migration housing; housing difficulties go beyond poor conditions; the interconnections of housing and well-being; and the relationship of discrimination, employment and housing.

Keywords: Housing experiences • racialized newcomers • Windsor–Essex • settlement • second-tier cities

The Canadian 2006 Census reports that over 14.5 million immigrants arrived in Canada in the last century, with over 1.1 million arriving since 2001 alone. Furthermore, immigrants in the last few decades were more likely to originate from countries that include a multiplicity of cultural and linguistic characteristics. The Census shows that 73% of the immigrants who arrived in the 1990s were visible minorities. A lesser known fact, however, is that Canadian newcomers are increasingly settling into non-traditional areas, such as “second-tier” cities, in addition to the top three immigrant-receiving cities—Toronto, Montréal and Vancouver.

Although the policy of encouraging immigrants to settle outside major cities and regions dates back several decades, Citizenship

and Immigration Canada (CIC) has recently re-emphasized the effort to “spread” immigrant flows more evenly across the country (CIC, 2002). Although the rationale is that immigrants will have better opportunities outside of the traditional settlement areas, some have questioned whether a policy of spreading immigration might not also be tied to the assumption that concentrations of immigrants in large Canadian cities are increasingly associated with a growing socio-economic divide in Canada and that such concentrations of immigrants may pose a threat to Canada’s future stability (Collacot, 2002; Stoffman, 2003).

Understandably, most of the research on immigration has focused on the settlement issues of newcomers in larger immigrant-

receiving communities such as Toronto, Montréal and Vancouver. However, there is also a need for research on settlement outside of these first-tier cities. The beginnings of such research can be seen in a small collection of recent studies (Lusis & Bauder, 2008; Carter et al., 2006; Abu-Ayyash & Brochu, 2006; Shanes, 2006; Di Biase & Bauder, 2005) and the special issues on these new settlement areas published by *Metropolis* (*Our Diverse Cities*, 2006–2008).

Housing and homelessness are of particular interest to the social work profession because it is frequently connected to other issues that they struggle with in their professional work.

This article contributes in that regard by highlighting the processes that facilitate, hinder or obstruct racialized newcomers' access to housing in Windsor–Essex—one of Ontario's fastest growing second-tier destinations for newcomer settlement. Research on the experiences of resettlement for immigrants and refugees suggests that obtaining stable and affordable housing is a critical part of the resettlement process (Rose & Ray, 2000; Carter et al., 2008; Murdie, 2003; Murdie & Teixeira, 2003) and an "important facilitator of integration into a new society" (Carter & Polevychok, 2004, p. 18). Housing and homelessness are of particular interest to the social work profession because it is frequently connected to other issues that they struggle with in their professional work. For example, research indicates that housing is a factor in admissions of children to care by family service workers of children's aid societies (Chau et al., 2001; Cohen-Schlanger et al.,

1992). It is not an overstatement to say that when people have housing that meets their needs, they are better able to work on other issues in their life, especially growing new roots in a new country.

Review of literature

Based on a comprehensive review on what is known about the housing experiences of recent immigrants, Wachsmuth (2008, p. v) notes that the "lack of affordable housing can trap newcomers in a 'cycle of deprivation,'" where they are forced to divert income from other essentials, possibly compromising their chances for socio-economic advancement in the long run. The lack of affordable housing also jeopardizes immigrants' prospects for integration and inclusion while sub-standard housing compromises their health. Wachsmuth further acknowledges that "poor housing also causes poor health *indirectly* by contributing to poverty" (*italics added*). Immigrants who are segregated by their income constraints and/or by racial discrimination may lack neighbourhood and community supports with the effect of postponing social integration and civic engagement. Wachsmuth cites the lack of social housing as a factor in exposing immigrant households to discrimination in the private market. The author points out that immigrant children and subsequent generations may be forced to grow up in substandard housing and high risk neighbourhoods that may negatively shape their life chances as well.

Research suggests that racialized immigrants are more likely to live in poor-quality and overcrowded households than non-racialized immigrants and that race and ethnicity might be implicated in such differential attainment of housing (Schill, Friedman & Rosenbaum, 1998). As part of the Housing New Canadians research project, Murdie (2002) compared the housing experiences of Somali and Polish immigrants. These findings indicate that immigrants of Polish descent have been more successful than the Somalis in establishing and maintaining

a progressive housing career because of differences that include socio-economic status, household size, community resources, pre-migration housing situation and perceived discriminatory barriers in Toronto’s tight rental market.

While the cost of housing in second-tier cities is generally lower than in first-tier cities, this does not necessarily mean that it is more affordable. Several second-tier cities, for example Kitchener–Waterloo and London in Ontario, have very expensive housing and low vacancy rates (Abu-Ayyash & Brochu 2006). Carter et al. (2006), in a study on recent immigrants in Winnipeg, found that while newcomers may have more affordable housing in the city, they may find themselves in unsuitable or inadequate housing situations.

Immigrants of Polish descent have been more successful than the Somalis in establishing and maintaining a progressive housing career because of differences that include socio-economic status, household size, community resources, pre-migration housing situation and perceived discriminatory barriers.

In an examination of the housing situation of immigrants in five Ontario second-tier cities, Wachsmuth (2008) found that second-tier cities in Ontario have a much higher retention rate for immigrants than Toronto. The author found that immigrants in second-tier cities were more likely to be renters than in Toronto; that they were also

more likely not to be in core housing need; and that though employment rates for newcomers were higher in Toronto, immigrants outside of Toronto were more satisfied with their economic circumstances. Wachsmuth also noted that recent immigrants report a greater degree of satisfaction with their quality of life in medium-sized cities. This final point has been established in other studies as well (Lusis & Bauder, 2007).

Methodology: A qualitative research design

The qualitative data for this study came from a larger, multi-method study conducted from 2004 to 2007 that focused on increasing our understanding of the housing experiences of recent immigrants and refugees in Windsor–Essex. The larger study included a cross-sectional housing survey of 204 newcomers in Windsor–Essex. Research findings presented in this article are from qualitative interviews with 20 participants purposively selected from the 204 survey participants. The in-depth interviews were conducted using the long interview method (McCracken, 1988), a qualitative research strategy that allows researchers to highlight the “life world” of participants and the content and pattern of their everyday experiences. As indicated in Table 1, the participants were a diverse group with respect to pre-migration experience, familial makeup, immigration status, country of origin and current situation in Canada. Five major themes were threaded through participants’ stories of settlement and housing.

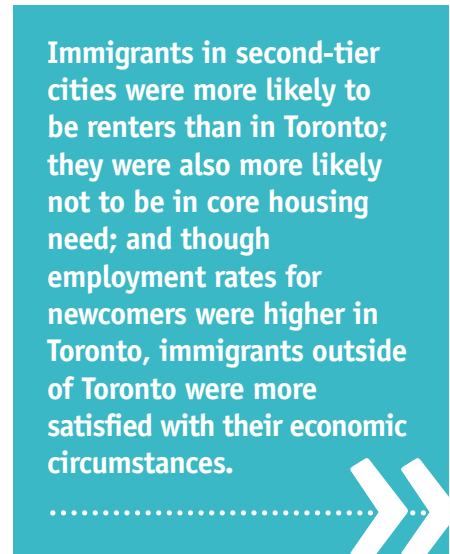
Pre-migration history as a frame: One of the themes that emerged from participants’ housing and settlement stories was how pre-migration history and experiences act as a “frame” through which present housing experiences are filtered and understood. Participants described various levels of dissatisfaction based on their previous housing conditions and their immigration history. Retha, one of the participants, described her experience living in a refugee

camp prior to coming to Canada as a refugee: “It was so scary; you can’t go to the camps, people are dying there; diseases. They are attacked, so many awful things happen to people. Women are raped.” Later in the interview, she described her satisfaction with her current housing despite its conditions: “In fact, the building where I am staying is very, very old and people always say why don’t you move out of that ugly building. I am fine; I am okay; I don’t want to move out of here.” Another participant, Ranu, described his residence in his country of origin: “I had a house with six rooms, living room and kitchen, big kitchen, bathroom yeah, big house.” He then expressed his dissatisfaction with his housing in Canada and shared his desire to buy a home after he completed his immigration papers. Pre-migration framing means that newcomers living in inadequate and inappropriate housing by Canadian standards may not evaluate their housing as such.

Choosing Windsor as a survival strategy: Another theme from participants’ stories was that settling in Windsor was a “survival strategy.” They perceived the cost of living in Windsor to be lower compared with Toronto. Other advantages that participants gave explaining why Windsor was easier to survive in were: having family and friends who were already settled in the area and could help with settlement information; Windsor, being in the southern most tip of Canada, had a milder winter, which made it easier to adjust to, and Windsor’s proximity to the United States meant access to education and employment opportunities in Detroit. These reasons were framed as part of a survival strategy that they perceived as important in their transition from one country to another. A participant, Kokie, explained, “I chose Windsor because my brother was in Detroit....I didn’t know Windsor, I didn’t know anything about Canada, I know it is a country, where I have no idea.” Another participant, Akin, noted, “I’ve continued to stay in Windsor because Windsor is a small city....Here in Windsor, if you don’t have fare

for the bus you can walk. In a big city that will be very difficult.” Another participant, Thando explains, “I decided to come to Windsor because people told me that Windsor is good in the wintertime, it doesn’t snow here much, and that it is a multicultural city. So that’s why I decided to move here.” Other participants identified lower living costs as a rationale for choosing Windsor. Chinasa explained, “Rent is low and it is a small city. Where are you going to go? [In Toronto], it is hard to save.”

Immigrants in second-tier cities were more likely to be renters than in Toronto; they were also more likely not to be in core housing need; and though employment rates for newcomers were higher in Toronto, immigrants outside of Toronto were more satisfied with their economic circumstances.



Housing challenges: Beyond poor conditions: Participants’ housing stories highlighted a number of issues. The majority of participants, since arriving in Canada, lived in poor conditions or substandard housing either during the time of the interview, or had previously lived in such conditions. Yet, many participants felt disempowered or unable to address their housing difficulties. Those whose apartments were in need of repairs or had pests were often unable to receive assistance from their superintendent or landlord, and they felt unequipped to advocate for themselves. A woman, Ngozi, described her experience of living in a substandard and doubled-up housing

with seven other people in a two-bedroom basement apartment that she and her ex-husband rented from a relative who was the legal tenant:

Me and my ex, we were living in the basement with our room, which is just drywall, you know what I mean, without any door. We had a garbage bag as a door....When I came, it was around winter time, and it was so cold and dry... sometimes, ants come or the insects and the cable was from there and we don't have light....We don't even have a door and the furnace was right beside us....Wow, I don't wish for people to live like that.

Social housing was frequently in areas that are viewed as unsafe; distance to amenities and access to transportation was problematic and units were in high-density housing.



Participants' stories revealed how the negligence of landlords and tenants' unfamiliarity of tenant rights increase newcomers' vulnerability to housing disadvantages.

While some participants on the social housing waiting list felt that when they eventually got access to a subsidized unit, their struggles would be over, other participants who were already in a social housing unit spoke of such access as not necessarily solving their housing problems but described, rather, other ongoing problems. They complained that the majority of the social housing stock in Windsor was quite old and in need of renovations. Other complaints included social housing was frequently in areas that are viewed as unsafe; distance to amenities and access to

transportation was problematic and units were in high-density housing, which creates problems as families are in close proximity to each other. Yinka noted, "We need it badly... .We need the [social housing] badly; if we could get it tomorrow, I am ready to move, but they didn't say anything. You have to wait sometimes two, three years, and already we have passed one year." Participants already in social housing often expressed disappointment. Mizpah said, "It's a good apartment, but the air in the building is not really good. But I don't bother people....I have it, I didn't have anything before, it's good."

Despite the complaints about the adequacy of social housing, participants unanimously emphasized that social housing alleviates pressures from unemployment and creates some sense of security for their family. Jackie emphasized this point: "In commercial housing, they don't care if you have a job, don't have a job...so housing [social housing] can help low-income [people]."

The role of housing in well-being:

Participants' stories connected the role that housing plays in helping participants develop a sense of belonging and feeling of rootedness. Participants described the impact housing had on their well-being and that of their children. Ehsan noted, "But sitting and living in the basement for two or three years, it affects your health physically and mentally and the mental part is very hard to deal with." Another participant, Mikun, noted, "I think my son, in the wintertime, he has bad asthma. I think it is just from house." Yet another participant noted, "Sometimes you know, this house is dirty so [the children] have flu every time.... I am not comfortable in this apartment....The doctor said because the house is not clean."

Discrimination, employment and housing:

The last theme that emerged from the study was the notion that housing problems were really employment and income problems because if one had adequate income or was employed, housing problems could be taken care of. Participants' stories illustrated how

discrimination plays an important role in obtaining both employment and housing. Ehsan pointed out, “I have been living here for four years. If you need a good place you must have a good amount of income. That’s what it takes to find a good place.” Another participant, Agnes, noted:

At this moment my family depends on my sole income from Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP); we don’t have any income except OSAP, and my husband has tried to get a job because if he had a job then we could reduce the amount of our loan. It is a burden. Financially, the OSAP money is not always sufficient to live a sound life.

Participants specifically identified the lack of recognition of foreign credentials and the requirement for “Canadian experience” in the area of employment. In the area of housing, similar barriers such as the requirement of Canadian references and credit history were cited as problematic. A participant, Odame, said, “I guess [I have had difficulty gaining employment] because I don’t speak good English; I have accent I guess.” Another participant, Steven, spoke at length on his experience of discrimination:

If they know that you’re from a different background...you are a person coming from a third-world country, or a Black person like myself, you know, these are the things you face. Human beings all over the world have different concepts. Some people say, “oh, these people are coming from poor places where they don’t have this and that, and they have limited understanding of what’s going on around the world,” and all those kinds of things.... They consider that you don’t have a sophisticated knowledge of doing whatever is needed to be done. It really contributes to what we face.

Many participants also faced housing discrimination based on source of income, accent, colour and country of origin and family

type. Others were penalized for not having Canadian references or a Canadian credit history. A participant stated, “Yeah people warn us not to go to this guy; he is not going to give you an apartment.” Another noted, “I...think it was just my race...one landlord asked if I speak English in my family...we said yes, we are capable of speaking English.”

Discussion and conclusion

Participants emphasized that housing problems were really employment and income problems because if newcomers were employed, they would have the income to afford housing that was adequate, appropriate and affordable. Participants’ stories illustrated how getting both housing and employment are made harder by discrimination. They described overt discrimination based on skin colour and source of income and how the lack of recognition of foreign credentials and a lack of “Canadian experience” was holding them back from gaining employment. Information from the 2006 Census suggests that Windsor’s overall unemployment rate obscures the fact that unemployment in Windsor disproportionately impacts immigrants, especially recent immigrants. While the unemployment rate of native-born residents in 2006 was roughly 4%, the rate for immigrants who arrived after 1991 was 10%. In fact, the rate for immigrants in Windsor who immigrated to Canada between 2001 and 2006 was above 18%, more than four times the rate of the Canadian-born Windsor residents. Thus, initiatives that address newcomers’ housing problems must also focus on opening up access to employment opportunities for them.

The day-to-day experiences of discrimination that newcomers have do not only limit their access to employment or housing but also may be harmful to their mental health. The stress associated with the experience of discrimination has been associated with depression and anxiety (Essed, 1991; Fernando, 1984; Kessler, Mickelson & Williams, 1999). The role of

Table 1
Socio-demographic characteristics of participants

		n=20	%
Gender	Female	13	65.0
	Male	7	35.0
Citizenship/ immigration status	Landed immigrant status	15	75.0
	Refugee/refugee claimant	4	20.0
	Canadian citizen	1	5.0
Race	Arab/West Asian origins	7	35.0
	African origins	6	30.0
	South Asian origins	4	20.0
	n/a	3	15.0
Employment status and income	Unemployed	14	70.0
	Employed part time	5	25.0
	Employed full time	1	5

discrimination in interactions with landlords, especially with participants who were unable to speak English, is an area that deserves education and advocacy. Social workers need to provide information to newcomers about their rights as tenants while advocating for improved housing conditions and greater accountability by landlords and housing authorities.

Participants’ conceptualizations of their housing situation were often framed by their pre-migration experiences. Settlement workers need to understand that refugee clients whose pre-migration experiences include poor living conditions, especially refugees and asylum-seekers from countries with oppressive political and judicial systems, may be less likely to complain about their current housing conditions even if these are problematic. Therefore, social workers may not be told of problems with landlords but may be told, instead, about problems with deteriorating health, food insecurity, isolation and generalized experiences with racism—sometimes articulated as feeling “out of place” in their residential communities. While

social workers will need to use this information to identify resources that help bridge the gap between household finances and household needs of newcomers, they will also need to work to challenge community attitudes and perceptions of newcomers that make them feel unwelcomed.

Current efforts to encourage immigrants to move to second-tier cities, such as Windsor, is paradoxical—although the cost of living in such second-tier cities is lower, there are fewer employment opportunities and support services for newcomers. Social workers and other community stakeholders need to advocate for resources to come with such efforts. The high rate of unemployment and underemployment among newcomers coupled with Ontario’s low social assistance rates increases newcomers’ vulnerability to inadequate housing and homelessness. Social workers also need to strongly advocate against the “credentialism” that limits employment opportunities for newcomers, which in turn limits their access to the adequate housing necessary for their full participation in the community.

Acknowledgements

This research project was made possible thanks to a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council grant.

References

- Abu-Ayyash, C. & Brochu, P. (2006). The uniqueness of the immigrant experience across Canada: A closer look at the Region of Waterloo. *Our Diverse Cities / Nos diverses cités*, 2, 20–26.
- Canada. Citizenship and Immigration Canada. (2007). Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration, 2006. Retrieved from http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/pdf/pub/immigration2006_e.pdf
- Carter, T., Polevychok, M. & Friesen, A. (2006). Winnipeg's inner city: Research on the challenges of growing diversity. *Our Diverse Cities / Nos diverses cités*, 2, 50–55.
- Carter, T. & Polevychok, M. (2004). *Housing is Good Social Policy*. Canadian Policy Research Networks Inc., Ottawa.
- Chau, S., Fitzpatrick, A., Hulchanski, J.D., Leslie, B., & Schatia, D. (2001). One in five... Housing as a factor in the admission of children to care. *Centre for Urban Studies Research Bulletin*, 3.
- Cohen-Schlanger, M., Fitzpatrick, A. Hulchanski, J.D. & Rapheal, D. (1995). Housing as a factor in admissions of children to temporary care: A survey. *Child Welfare*, 74(3).
- Collacot, M. (2002). *Canada's immigration policy: The need for major reform*. Fraser Institute Occasional Paper.
- Di Biase, S. & Bauder, H. (2005). Immigrant settlement in Ontario: Location and local labour markets. *Canadian Ethnic Studies / Études ethniques au Canada*, 37(3), 114–135.
- Essed, P. (1991). *Everyday Racism*. Claremont, CA: Hunter House.
- Fernando, S. (1984). Racism as a cause of depression. *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, 30, 41–49.
- Hulchanski, J.D. (1997). *Barriers to equal access in the housing market: The role of discrimination on the basis of race and gender*. Toronto: Centre for Urban and Community Studies.
- Kessler, R. C., Mickelson, K. D., & Williams, D. R. (1999). The prevalence, distribution, and mental health correlates of perceived discrimination in the United States. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 40, 208–230.
- Lusis, T. & Bauder, H. (2008). Provincial immigrants: The social, economic and transnational experiences of the Filipino Canadian community in three Ontario second-tier cities. *CERIS Working paper series*, 62. Toronto: CERIS, The Ontario Metropolis Centre.
- McCracken, G. (1988). *The Long Interview*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Murdie, R. (2003). Housing affordability and Toronto's rental market: Perspectives from the housing careers of Jamaican, Polish and Somali newcomers. *Housing, Theory and Society*, 20(4), 183–196.
- Murdie, R.A. and C. Teixeira (2003) "Towards a Comfortable Neighbourhood and Appropriate Housing: Immigrant Experiences in Toronto", pp. 132-191 in Anisef, P. and M. Lanphier (eds.), *The World in a City*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Noh, S., Beiser, M., Kaspar, V., Hou, F., & Rummens, J. (1999). Discrimination and emotional well-being. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 40, 193–207.
- Rose, D. & B. Ray. (2000). *Landed refugee claimants first three years in Quebec: Their housing experiences*. INRS – Urbanisation, Institut National de la Recherche Scientifique, Montréal.
- Schill, M.H., Friedman, S. & Rosenbaum, E. (1998). The housing conditions of immigrants in New York City. *Journal of Housing Research*, 9(2), 201–235.
- Shanes, M. (2006). Second-tier metropolitan areas: Highlights based on the 2001 Census. *Our Diverse Cities / Nos diverses cités*, 2, 44–48.
- Stoffman, D. (2003). The mystery of Canada's high immigration levels. *Canadian Issues / Thèmes canadiens*, April, 23–25.
- Wachsmuth, D. (2008). Housing for immigrants in Ontario's medium-sized cities. *CPRN Research Report*.

Biographical notes

Uzo Anucha is an associate professor at the School of Social Work, York University. Her scholarship, teaching and professional activities focus on promoting equity and access for diverse communities within local, national and international contexts. Alexander Lovell is a PhD candidate in geography at Queen's University, and Daphne Jeyapal is a PhD student at the Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto.

Building Bridges

Exploring Newcomer Settlement and Integration Supports in Brantford and the Counties of Brant, Haldimand and Norfolk using Community-based Participatory Research (CBPR)

Bharati Sethi

Abstract

The turn of the 21st century saw the highest increase in the immigrant population Canada. These immigrants are no longer staying in their ports of entry but are moving to smaller urban areas (Statistics Canada, 2008a). In this article, I present findings from a community-based participatory research (CBPR) collaboration with the Immigrant Settlement Transition and Employment (ISTEP) committee in Brantford, Ontario—a newcomer task force. The research aims to understand the settlement challenges that newcomers face in Brantford, a middle-sized urban/rural region now home to an unprecedented number of newcomers. Using a strength-based perspective, I examine both sides of the settlement relationship—the host community's roles and responsibilities in the integration of newcomers, and newcomers' perception of service provision. Data were gathered from 212 newcomers and 237 service providers, as well as from numerous consultations and reflexive journals. Five areas of settlement support were explored: education, training, employment, health, and social support. While overall findings suggest that newcomers face challenges in all these areas, especially noteworthy is the discrepancy between the perceptions of newcomers and service providers. Implications for social work policy and practice are discussed.

Keywords: Immigration • Brantford • newcomers • participatory • gap analysis

It is now apparent from many studies that the economic, social, and political integration of newcomers in Canada remains a challenge (Bandari, Horvath & To, 2006; Simich, Hamilton & Baya, 2006; Teo, 2007). Previous studies have largely focused on the needs of immigrants settling in Canada's large metropolitan areas (Bandari et al., 2006; Simich et al., 2006; Teo, 2007). In recent years, however, due to the government's growing interest in supporting a more balanced geographical distribution of immigrants throughout the country, small-town communities and rural areas are showing

more interest in attracting newcomers (Citizenship and Immigration Canada [CIC], 2001). Immigration can be a vital way to revitalize the economies of these rural communities, which often face the risks associated with declining populations (CIC, 2001). It is noteworthy that between 2001 and 2006, the city of Brantford, Ontario, and the surrounding counties of Brant, Haldimand, and Norfolk—all middle-sized urban and rural locations—experienced a rebound in the number of immigrants settling in these areas, after a significant drop in the 1990s

(Grand Erie Training and Adjustment Board [GETAB], 2007).

This research project was motivated by my personal, professional, and academic experiences. As a resident of Brantford for fourteen years; as a visible-minority immigrant; as a student; as a provider and a recipient of social services; and as a community volunteer—to utilize all these life experiences—and as part of my master’s thesis in social work, I took up the challenge of identifying the problems and supports of newcomers to Canada who settle in the Brantford area. This research was performed in collaboration with the Immigrant Settlement Transition Employment and Partnership (ISTEP). This task force for newcomers operates under the aegis of the Grand Erie Training and Adjustment Board (GETAB) to support the integration of newcomers through partnerships in the local community.

What settlement and integration services exist for newcomers, in four key areas: education and training, employment, health, and social support? And how do newcomers use these services?

Some current literature, such as the publication *Our Diverse Cities*, addresses the issue of how well a small community understands and responds to the settlement needs of newcomers. and such knowledge is crucial, since it is required to launch discussions among employers, communities, and funding bodies about which elements of rural life are conducive to immigrant settlement, and how to improve access to social services for new residents (Gregory, 2005; Buxton et al., 2007).

Method

This study addresses this gap in the production of knowledge by examining both sides of the settlement relationship: the host society’s roles and responsibilities in helping newcomers to integrate, and the newcomers’ own perceptions of the services available to them. The two related questions this research attempts to answer are: “What settlement and integration services exist for newcomers, in four key areas: education and training, employment, health, and social support? And how do newcomers use these services?”

In keeping with the “participatory” nature of Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR), I engaged with members of the local immigrant community, and with service providers in the area; I attended ISTEP meetings; and I immersed myself in multicultural events. Through these activities, I was able to build a rapport both with newcomers and with service providers. I listened to their stories, and recorded key conversations in a reflexive journal. I used several tools to generate data from 449 participants: two self-administered survey questionnaires (both service providers and newcomers); narratives of community elders, and interviews with ISTEP members. This was a deliberate attempt to enhance the reflective and relational knowledge that is a striking outcome of CBPR (Park, 1999).

The survey instruments were created in consultation with both newcomers and community stakeholders. To ensure comparability with other population surveys, both questionnaires were adapted from Wave 2 section of the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants (LSIC) (Statistics Canada, 2003). The questionnaire and the consent form for newcomers were translated from English into the two most commonly spoken other languages in this area (Urdu and Mandarin), and then translated back to ensure a satisfactory equivalence. The tool employed to design the questionnaires and collect the data was Survey Monkey; most questions asked for answers to be rated on a Likert-type scale, with an “Other” category provided for participants

who felt that the choices offered were not applicable to their circumstances. For newcomers, purposive sampling was used to maximize the diversity of participants. The local service providers most likely to work with the immigrant population were chosen from the ISTEP database; those selected, from over 21 community organizations, were sent information about this research and invited to participate. Of the 449 participants, 212 newcomers (n=212) and 237 service providers (n=237) completed the survey. Quantitative and qualitative techniques were used to analyze the data, which were divided into five areas: demographic characteristics, education, training, employment, health, and social support. The key findings are presented below.

Demographic characteristics

Newcomers reported 45 different ethnic origins, with South Asia and the People’s Republic of China as the first two birthplaces. Almost half (48%) were permanent residents of Canada, and most (70%) were between 25 and 44 years of age. The gender balance was skewed: some 66% were females, and 34% males. About half of all immigrants (51%) reported making less than \$19,999 per year, or had no income at all.

Of the service providers, most (71%) represented a non-profit agency. They reported over 15 countries of origin for the newcomers they served; again, China and South Asia were the top two. They also stated that 30% of their clients were primarily young adults, aged between 25–34; and that 39% were Canadian citizens.

These findings are similar to both local and national data. For example, the 2006 Census reported that most of the growth in the visible minority population in the 2001–2006 period came from newcomers of South Asian and Chinese origin, and also that most were of the core working-age group of 25 to 54 (Statistics Canada, 2008a). Further, the 2007 GETAB report on newcomers to Brantford and area also found that for the 2001–2006 period, the largest

contributor was Asia, which for the first time surpassed Europe as the leading immigrant-sending country. Although there was a steady increase in the 25–34 age group, the largest increase was newcomers under 15 years old.

Most of the growth in the visible minority population in the 2001–2006 period came from newcomers of South Asian and Chinese origin, and also that most were of the core working-age group of 25 to 54.

Education

Both newcomers (69%) and service providers (73%) reported that newcomers could speak English and/or French at least “fairly well,” and 71% of newcomers said that they could write either or both official languages at least “fairly well” before arriving. The majority of newcomers (88%) had a post-secondary education before coming to Canada. Given these figures, it is perplexing that both service providers and newcomers identified “Language and/or Communication” as a barrier to economic and social integration. It could be argued, as do Creese and Kambere (2003), that it is not language skills per se, but rather the “invisible cloak of bias,” and the perception of an “alien accent,” that mitigate against acceptance into employment. Other authors propose that having a foreign accent may be equated by some Canadians with a lack of intelligence and/or lack of English fluency. These may hamper job opportunities and advancement, and hinder the full participation of immigrants in their new society (Derwing & Thompson, 2007; Newman, 2002).

Employment

Over half (59%) of the newcomers were employed at the time of the survey, though they identified “Lack of Canadian Experience” (89%) as the most common barrier to employment. Service providers, meanwhile, rated “Communication Problems” (85%) as the most common barrier to newcomers’ access to employment, and “Education Accreditation” (77%) as the most common barrier to job promotion. In terms of helping to secure employment, 89% of newcomers identified both “Employer-Paid Training” and “On-the-Job Training” as the top two resources available to assist them.

The major cause of high unemployment for newcomers is the mismatch of available jobs with their educational and/or professional skills.

In spite of high levels of education and skills, many participants were unemployed or underemployed. This mirrors other studies that report low labour-force participation among newcomers to Canada, and a deteriorating economic situation. For example, Picot, Hou and Coulombe (2007) found that among the 2000 entering cohort, increased university education of immigrants did very little to improve their economic outcomes compared to earlier cohorts. According to some ISTEP members, the major cause of high unemployment for newcomers is the mismatch of available jobs with their educational and/or professional skills. For example, Brantford’s two core industries, agriculture and manufacturing, are currently experiencing significant job losses. Most of the gaps are in training and support services needed to sustain industry-based workforce development (Halyk, 2009). Although most newcomers in this

survey have a university degree, it may not be in an area for which there is much local demand. This finding needs careful consideration, as employment opportunities dictate where immigrants will settle. Another factor to consider is that as more educated married women enter the workforce, young men are more likely to settle in areas where there are job openings for their spouses as well as themselves (CIC, 2001).

Training

Of the newcomers who attended the various training workshops in Brantford and area, the numbers who found these “Helpful” in finding employment were 37% for language training; 26% for employment training; and 25% for educational training. Nearly all (95%) suggested that the federal settlement program LINC (Language Instruction for New Canadians) was needed to facilitate their integration. And while 87% of newcomers rated “Not Knowing Where to Find Courses or Programs” as a barrier to accessing training, 77% of service providers identified “Communication Problems” as the most common barrier.

Given the high unemployment rate of newcomers, it is a serious concern that less than half the respondents reported finding the training courses they attended as helpful to them. This speaks strongly to the need to examine the type and level of training available in the community, and whether these are relevant to this skilled cohort of immigrants. For example, one person indicated that there are “no courses available for continuing education for experienced people.” A service provider echoed a similar sentiment: “Perhaps there is a mismatch between the types of training available in this town, and what these groups of professional newcomers require.”

Health

Most newcomers (71%) were familiar with the physical health services offered in the community, but less than half (40%) were

familiar with mental health services. Compared to the 80% of newcomers who rated “Time Pressure” as a barrier to accessing health services, 77% of service providers viewed being “Unaware of Services” as the most common barrier for newcomers in terms of accessing either physical or mental health services. Moreover, newcomers were substantially less likely than service providers (62% compared to 88%) to self-assess their own mental health as “Good.” One cannot therefore conclude that they are not at risk of mental illness. Although the quantitative responses may suggest that newcomers’ mental health is reasonably good, the qualitative data sketch a different picture. A constant theme of sadness, loneliness, and failure seems to underlie many responses, with sentiments often expressed: “Not happy, no job, little friends, husband work in difficult job,” or “Feel depressed in this country, as I feel I have failed.”

The discrepancy in responses between service providers and newcomers may reflect differences in language use, and/or perceptions of what constitutes “poor health.”

Further, the discrepancy in responses between service providers and newcomers may reflect differences in language use, and/or perceptions of what constitutes “poor health.” Immigrants may describe poor health using somatic terms, or by referring to their own current situations (Simich, et al. 2006; Noh, Hyman & Fenta, 2001); for example “For women it is *hard* because I have to stay home.” They may also need a greater sense of safety to discuss their mental health issues.

Social support

Only 77% of newcomers, compared to 95% of service providers, perceived that immigrants were “Connected” to their own ethnic community. Similarly, a mere 44% of newcomers, compared to 51% of service providers, viewed newcomers as “Connected” to the larger community. There was, in fact, a consensus among both newcomers (40%) and service providers (42%) that newcomers had experienced discrimination in differing social “Locations of Discrimination,” identified as “At Work,” “In the Neighbourhood,” and “In the Community.” This disturbing evidence indicates that larger social issues such as racism, discrimination, and poverty may be predictors of individual mental health (Government of Canada, 2006; Zunzunegui, Forster, Gauvin, Raynault & Willms, 2006). Even without active discrimination, the mere existence of language barriers may alienate immigrants from the host society, and can have a profound impact on their mental status (Government of Canada, 2006; Zunzunegui, et al., 2006). In spite of all these identified barriers, however, it is encouraging that more than half (53%) of the newcomers were not planning to leave Brantford or the surrounding tri-county area. One possible reason may be the affordable housing, plus easy access to major urban centres and international borders. Some observers (Buxton, et al., 2007) suggest that since social service providers in rural areas deal with smaller systems, they are able to identify problems more quickly, and quickly initiate change. In recent years, for instance, several community initiatives have emerged in Brantford to assist with newcomer resettlement. The ISTEP program, not to mention this research, are examples of such initiatives.

It is noteworthy that both service providers (87%) and newcomers (88%) agreed that there is a significant gap in services in “specialized programs for immigrant women.” There was further consensus on “lack of affordable child care,” which was identified as a major issue in almost all areas of settlement.

This finding validated the experience of ISTEP members, who have long been aware through anecdotal evidence that this community requires good day care. As one female newcomer noted: “First my husband needs to find a job....Due to lack of culturally relevant and affordable child care, as I have a small child, it is difficult for me to go to work.”

Information should be available in several languages, and should be available in places frequented by immigrants, such as laundromats, multicultural grocery stores, ethnic restaurants, and places of worship.

Summary of discussions and implications of research

Current research points to the paradox of Canada’s skill-based immigrant selection policy: it favours newcomers who can contribute to the economy, and yet fails to adequately support them in their attempts to find work. Over time, after immigration, newcomers may experience discrimination; unemployment, leading to loss in socio-economic status; lack of social support; and unmet health-care needs. All these factors are likely to be detrimental to their personal adjustment, and to their ability to make useful contributions. Social workers and service providers require adequate tools and funding to be able to improve both newcomers’ access to community services, and their use of them. Immigrants may also often be constrained by geographic and legal issues, such as licensing requirements for professions, shortage of doctors, etc.

Recommendations

In view of the barriers identified in this study, community social workers and service providers should:

- Develop and implement solutions, in consultation with the newcomer population and diverse communities.
- Improve collaboration among community agencies for designing and delivering settlement programs. This collaboration could include effective communication, referrals, ongoing dialogue between agencies, inter-agency and inter-county meetings, and community forums.
- Increase newcomers’ awareness of the community services available to them through orientation packages, advertisement in ethnic media, flyers, and online sources. Information should be available in several languages, and should be available in places frequented by immigrants, such as laundromats, multicultural grocery stores, ethnic restaurants, and places of worship.
- Improve existing childcare facilities to make them both affordable, and culturally sensitive.
- Implement mandatory training in diversity and cultural competence for all community agency employees; and also increase diversity within those agencies by hiring members of minority groups.
- Invest in employer partnerships, such as workshops, training seminars, and round-table discussions. These initiatives could provide newcomers with the employment-related language training and occupation-specific terminology they need to succeed in the workplace.
- Organize health fairs to reduce the stigma of mental health issues. Invite non-traditional practitioners, such as naturopaths, chiropractors, Chinese medical experts, and other alternative health-care providers, to conduct information workshops at these events.

- Meet with City Council members to advocate for immigrants, particularly in support of policies and programs that promote employment equity, social and political inclusion, and good health.

Conclusion

The multifaceted nature of newcomer settlement in Canada's small and medium-sized cities reinforces the need for proactive planning, and also for collaboration between many social levels: government policy makers and service providers. This collaboration should include financial and organizational support to nurture immigration. It is vital to strengthen newcomer capacity in certain areas, to attract and retain immigrants there, in order to fully realize the potential benefits of Canada's immigration policy. Otherwise, the government's plan for even distribution of immigrants will not succeed.

Acknowledgements

The author acknowledges valuable insights of Dr. Martha Kuwee Kumsa, and feedback from Dr. Carol Stalker and Dr. Lea Caragata, on this article. She also recognizes assistance from her friend Carla Nardone.

References

- Bandari, B., Horvath, S., & To, R. (2006). Choices and voices of immigrant men: Reflections on social integration. *Canadian Ethnic Studies / Études ethniques au Canada*, 38(1), 141–148.
- Buxton, J., Ouellette, V., Brazier, A., Whiteside, C., Mathias, R., Dawar, M., & Mulkins, A. (2007). Bridging the gap in population health for rural and Aboriginal communities: A needs assessment of public health training for rural primary care physicians. *Canadian Journal of Rural Medicine / Journal canadien de la médecine rurale*, 12(2), 81–88.
- Chui, T., Tran, K., & Maheux, H. (2007). *Immigration in Canada: A portrait of the foreign-born population, 2006 Census*. Retrieved March 1, 2008, from <http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2006/as-sa/97-557/pdf/97-557-XIE2006001.pdf>
- Canada. Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC). *Our Diverse Cities / Nos diverses cités*. Available at http://canada.metropolis.net/research-policy/cities/publication/diverse_cite_magazine_e.pdf
- . Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC). (2001). *Towards a more balanced geographic distribution of immigrants*. Retrieved January 14, 2008 from <http://dsp-psd.pwgsc.gc.ca/Collection/Ci51-109-2002E.pdf>
- . Public Health Agency of Canada. (2006). *The human face of mental health and mental illness in Canada*. Retrieved March 15, 2008 from www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/human-humain06
- . Statistics Canada. (2003). *Longitudinal survey of immigrants to Canada: Wave 2*. Retrieved January 22, 2008, from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-611-x/89-611-x2003001-eng.pdf>
- . Statistics Canada. (2008a). *Canadian demographics at a glance*. Retrieved March 15, 2008, from http://dsp-psd.pwgsc.gc.ca/collection_2008/statcan/91-003-X/91-003-XIE.html
- . Statistics Canada (2008b). *Canada's ethnocultural mosaic, 2006 census*. Retrieved February 17, 2009, from <http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2006/as-sa/97-562/pdf/97-562-XIE2006001.pdf>
- Creese, G., & Kambere, E. (2003). What colour is your English? *Canadian Review of Sociology / Revue canadienne de sociologie*, 40(5), 565–573.
- Derwing, T. M., & Thompson, R. (2007). A longitudinal study of ESL learners' fluency and comprehensibility development. *Applied Linguistics*, 29(3), 359–380.
- Grand Erie Training and Adjustment Board. (2007). *Workforce focus*. Retrieved January 22, 2008, from <http://www.getab.on.ca/docseng/dec07immigration.pdf>
- Gregory, R. (2005). Whispers on the wind: The small quiet voice of rural health and welfare practice. *Rural Society Journal*, 15(3), 267–274.
- Halyk, J. (2009). *Trends, opportunities and priorities (TOP) report* [brochure].
- Newman, B. (2002, March). *Accent* [Short story]. In *American Scholar*. Retrieved September 25, 2008, from <http://www.articlearchives.com/humanities-social-science/language-languages/798821-1.html>
- Noh, S., Hyman, I., & Fenta, H. (2001). *Pathways and barriers to mental health care for Ethiopians in Toronto*. Retrieved December 8, 2008, from <http://ceris.metropolis.net>

Park, P. (1999). People, knowledge and change in participatory research. *Management Learning*, 30(2), 141–157.

Picot, G., Hou, F., & Coulombe, S. (2007). *Chronic low income and low-income dynamics among recent immigrants*. Retrieved March 1, 2008, from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11f0019m/11f0019m2007294-eng.pdf>

Simich, L., Hamilton, H., & Baya, B. (2006). Mental distress, economic hardship, and expectations of life in Canada. *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 43(3), 418–444.

Teo, S. (2007). Vancouver's newest Chinese diaspora: Settlers or "immigrant prisoners?" *GeoJournal*, 68(2), 211–222.

Zuzunegui, M., Forster, M., Gauvin, L., Raynault, M., & Willms, J. (2006). Community unemployment and immigrants health in Montréal. *Social Science and Medicine*, 63, 485–500.

Biographical notes

Bharati Sethi is a PhD student at the Faculty of Social Work, Wilfrid Laurier University, where she completed the research reported in this study as part of her MSW requirements (Wilfrid Laurier University). Currently, she is a recipient of the Vanier Canada Graduate Scholarship. She was also awarded the 2008 Annual student Membership Award of the Ontario Association of Social Workers (OASW). She is a member of the Canadian Association of Social Work, and her passion is researching issues that impact the lives of immigrants and their families in Canada. A Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Graduate Scholarship, a Hilary Weston Scholarship and funding from Grand Erie Training and Adjustment Board (GETAB) provided financial support for this study.

Safe Havens?

Mapping Settlement Services in Three Canadian Urban Centres

Susan McGrath • Patricia Burke Wood • Julie E. E. Young

Abstract

This article compares and contrasts the different service-provision models of settlement agencies in Calgary, Toronto, and Montréal. Analysis of different federal, provincial, and municipal contexts highlight issues of centralization, problems of fragmentation, and a pressure for locality. Financial sustainability and empirical research guiding future decision making are identified as needs, as are resources for practitioners and policy makers.

Keywords: Refugees • settlement services • social sustainability

When people arrive in Canada as immigrants and refugees, their experiences differ according to the services available to them in the cities where they settle. This article explores the infrastructure of settlement services in three Canadian cities: Calgary, Toronto, and Montréal. In these cities, settlement services offered must contend with various political and geographic situations, and so the services also vary in terms of centralization, fragmentation, and their approach to locality. We compare the different organizational models, and attempt to assess whether they support or inhibit newcomers' "social sustainability." This concept, first outlined by Polèse and Stren (2000), refers to the broad capacity of individuals to engage society culturally, socially, and politically.

Part of the mandate of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) is to resettle, protect, and provide "a safe haven" for refugees; and also to help newcomers to participate fully in the economic, political, social, and cultural life of the country (CIC, 2009c). CIC currently is revising its service delivery system to what it calls a "modernized approach to settlement programming," to be implemented in 2010

(Smith, 2010), claiming that the new approach will offer greater flexibility, results-oriented programming, and better planning and coordination (Smith, 2010). In future, service provider organizations (SPOs) will submit proposals to CIC that specify their anticipated results in one of five areas: orientation, language skills, labour market access, welcoming communities, or policy and program development. SPOs are expected to coordinate their efforts among themselves, while at the same time competing with one another in submitting proposals to offer services through CIC. Needless to say, these changes are creating much anxiety in the settlement sector, as SPOs restructure their programs to meet the new funding formula in an increasingly competitive and unpredictable system. In the past, SPOs usually had their funding renewed if they were providing effective services; now, they cannot predict what services they will be funded to provide—if any. The new system favours large agencies with the resources and flexibility to expand their network of programs, leaving smaller agencies more vulnerable. This competition for funding will reduce the

agencies' incentive to collaborate: it will no longer be in their best interest to and share best practices and program information.

The Refugee and Humanitarian Resettlement Program offers related services exclusively to refugees, delivered through the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP). In June 2010, the Canadian legislature passed Bill C-11, the *Balanced Refugee Reform Act*, which includes an increase in funding for RAP services. It also provides for an increase in the number of government-assisted and privately sponsored refugees to be settled in Canada.

Importantly, different agreements between the federal government and certain provinces have resulted in variations in the extent to which each region delivers these programs. We argue that it is necessary to critically examine their strengths and limitations—especially within the current context of an unstable convergence of factors: on the one hand, a neo-liberal agenda of downloading governance to the local level; and on the other hand, the desire of municipalities to increase their local authority with regard to social issues, including immigration and diversity (Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2009; see also Brown, 1997; Holston, 1999; Purcell, 2008).

Context

The current neo-liberal agenda of governance promotes the delivery of social services through local and, increasingly, private agencies. Therefore, it is important to understand the details of each local model. For instance, an agency's ability to be flexible and sensitive to community needs may be advantageous, yet in such situations it becomes increasingly difficult to share best practices among agencies. Furthermore, service-delivery organizations are increasingly finding their resources stretched thin, and must rely on fundraising efforts to stay afloat (Community Social Planning Council of Toronto and Family Service Association of Toronto, 2006; Creese, 1998; Richmond & Shields, 2005). Any analysis

of the role of settlement agencies is complicated by these factors.

A further complexity, in an urban context, is the many axes of diversity to be found in cities. In North American society, difference is often negotiated through public institutions—the social spaces where individuals and communities mix with one another, and where concepts of social justice and collective well-being are redefined over time (Amin, 2002; Wood & Gilbert, 2005). Consequently, access to and perceptions of these public spaces are critical to our collective notions of Canada as an equitable and sustainable democracy. In a volume edited by Polèse and Stren (2000), contributors repeatedly identified diversity as a central issue of the urban challenge to “turn city-dwellers into citizens” (p. viii). This challenge reflects the difficulty that newcomers experience in acquiring the means to express themselves in public, and to have an impact on their city.

“Social sustainability.”
This concept, first outlined by Polèse and Stren (2000), refers to the broad capacity of individuals to engage society culturally, socially, and politically.

One of the critical roles played by settlement agencies is their position in the development of social sustainability, both for newcomers and for society in general. Acquiring this ability means creating durable social networks, particularly for newcomers, so that the “ups and downs” of daily life do not escalate to crises. Settlement that is satisfactory to both newcomers and the host society is a process that extends beyond merely meeting the

practical needs of housing and employment. Those factors, while essential, must be complemented by the formation of social networks, to enable a sense of belonging and acceptance.

Immigrants and refugees indicated the importance of their personal relationships with such workers, as well as the practical assistance they provide in terms of accessing health and social services.

Rose and Ray (2000) note that we need to ask what immigrants' immediate neighbourhood offers them, in terms of services available in their language, contacts with other immigrants, and contacts with those speaking the official language(s) of the host society. Access to same-origin neighbours and services is known to ease the transition process and to facilitate short-term adaptation, while access to residents from the host society is important to social integration in the longer term. Settlement agencies can act as contact points, and facilitate those formal and informal connections. Indeed, after examining the role of public institutions and spaces in three urban centres, we have identified the crucial position of frontline settlement workers in newcomers' experiences (Wood et al., 2010). Immigrants and refugees indicated the importance of their personal relationships with such workers, as well as the practical assistance they provide in terms of accessing health and social services. These attachments are both emotional and professional.

In the last decade, the Canadian government has adopted an Integrated Service Delivery

approach to providing services. This "single-window" approach brings together related government services, so that citizens can access them all at once; and it has become an integral part of thinking and practice in the management of public organizations. However, this emphasis on collaborative service delivery means that governments rely heavily on local community engagement to serve citizens—that is, government agencies must collaborate effectively with non-governmental service providers (Kernaghan, 2009). It is important to keep in mind that different cities handle this problem in different ways, due to their distinct political and socio-economic contexts.

Structure of services in the three cities

Calgary

Calgary's model of social services delivery is influenced by its provincial and municipal contexts. Alberta's approach to immigrant settlement and integration, under the purview of its Ministry of Employment and Immigration, emphasizes meeting business needs, and hence makes extensive use of temporary worker programs. At the local level, there is a long history of relatively weak municipal governments that must rely on provincial funding, and so the municipal government is not in a strong position to meet the needs of newcomers. In 2008, Alberta received a total of 24,195 immigrants, of which 1,845 (7.6%) were refugees (CIC, 2009b). Settlement programs are managed by CIC's Calgary office, whose jurisdiction is southern Alberta—including the cities of Calgary, Lethbridge, Red Deer, and Medicine Hat. Of all immigrants who come to Alberta, 65% arrive in this area. Calgary, with its population of over one million, is also a site for secondary migration: people who initially settled in other urban centres often relocate there, primarily because of work opportunities. Concerns have expressed about the federal funding formula that ties financial

support to original ports of landing (Ferguson, 2009), and also about the lack of a formal operational plan by Calgary's CIC office (CIC, 2008a).

The task of connecting newcomers with provincial and federal assistance programs is largely accomplished by civil society organizations. The predominant service-delivery model in Calgary is "one-stop shopping," the approach mentioned above that allows individuals to access various services in one place. While five or six settlement agencies now operate in Calgary, two of the larger ones are Immigrant Services Calgary and the Calgary Catholic Immigration Society. While both offer settlement and integration services to immigrants and refugees, only CCIS offers the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP), which supports newly arrived refugees. CCIS is a non-profit organization that boasts a "dynamic multicultural, multilingual, and multidisciplinary team of professionals who collectively speak over 70 languages" (CCIS, 2010). Its varied programs, funded by CIC, range from one-day airport welcome support, through 19-day temporary accommodations, to resettlement programs that work with newcomers for three years. While newcomers report a high degree of satisfaction with the all-in-one model, settlement workers report increased stress and fatigue (Wood et al., 2010). With limited resources and a greater demand for services, workers are vulnerable to stress and at risk of burnout. The latter may be related to secondary traumatic stress, or vicarious trauma—the result of engaging empathetically with the traumatic experiences of clients (Este, 2010). In such situations, employers and workers should pay close attention to wellness in the workplace (Ester, 2010).

Toronto

Fifty percent of all immigrants to Canada arrive in the Toronto area. In 2008, Ontario received 110,896 immigrants, of which 11,860 (10.7%) were refugees (CIC, 2009b). Since the overall population of Toronto is 2.7 million, this means

that a sizable and growing percentage of its inhabitants are newcomers. The information guide for social services in Toronto identifies 189 programs that provide services for refugees (Findhelp Information Services, 2010). Many organizations have particular service agendas, or an ethno-specific clientele. Negotiating this labyrinth of services can be a challenge, and efforts to coordinate services among agencies have recently intensified.

Calgary, with its population of over one million, is also a site for secondary migration: people who initially settled in other urban centres often relocate there, primarily because of work opportunities.

In 2005, the governments of Ontario and Canada signed the first Canada-Ontario Immigration Agreement (COIA), a five-year, \$920-million program to help newcomers integrate into Ontario communities. This agreement was followed in 2006 by the Canada-Ontario-Toronto Memorandum of Understanding on Immigration and Settlement, signed by all three levels of government—the first such initiative. In 2008, CIC and the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration asked settlement agencies in Toronto to form Local Immigration Partnerships (LIPs). It is hoped that these will strengthen local capacity, encourage communities to include immigrants in their overall planning, and benefit neighbourhoods that successfully integrate newcomers into their social and economic networks (Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture, 2010). However, the COIA agreement expires

in 2010, and the social-service organizations affected worry that it will not be renewed, or that it might take a new form. All CIC-funded agencies were directed in February 2010 to reduce their budgets by 5%, a move that appears to be related to efforts to reduce the federal deficit.

In 2008, Quebec received 45,212 immigrants, of whom 4,522 (10%) were refugees. The vast majority of newcomers (86.9%) settle in the metropolitan area of Montréal, which has a population of 1.9 million.

While COIA and the LIPs recognize the importance of municipalities and neighbourhoods in providing responsive services, they are also concerned that responsibility for these services will be transferred to provinces and municipalities without adequate funding from the federal government. The LIPs are still at an early stage of development, and it remains to be seen how effective they will be at delivering services—and what impact they will have on the funding of local SPOs. This pressure to consolidate services often leaves community-based agencies struggling with the tensions of being compelled to form partnerships with agencies with whom they have been—and may continue to be—in competition for funding resources (McGrath, Moffat, Lee & George, 2010).

Montréal

Since signing the Canada-Quebec Accord relating to Immigration and Temporary Admission of Aliens in 1991, the Quebec government has

played an important role in immigrant affairs: it determines levels of immigration, the criteria for selecting newcomers who apply, and the expectation of where they will settle in the province. More than in the rest of the country, there is a focus on preserving the province's "demographic importance within Canada, and the integration of immigrants in a manner that respects the distinct identity of Quebec" (CIC, 1991). Federal funding for immigration is transferred to the province of Quebec, which has full discretion over its administration. Immigration issues are the mandate of the Quebec Ministry of Immigration and Cultural Communities (QMICC). In 2008, Quebec received 45,212 immigrants, of whom 4,522 (10%) were refugees (CIC, 2009b). The vast majority of newcomers (86.9%) settle in the metropolitan area of Montréal (QMICC, 2009), which has a population of 1.9 million. Settlement services are delivered through local organizations.

In 1971, agencies serving refugees and immigrants in the Montréal area formed an umbrella organization, the *Table de concertation des organismes au service des personnes réfugiées et immigrantes* (TCRI). With hundreds of member organizations, TCRI advocates for the protection of refugees and immigrants in Quebec, and helps to integrate all categories of newcomers to the city (TCRI, 2010). The organization serves as an intermediary between the front-line agencies and the provincial and federal governments. One of its objectives is to "encourage the development of improved coordination and collaboration among all stakeholders working with refugees and immigrants, and between the community network and the government sector" (TCRI, 2010).

However, over the past few years, there have been some serious concerns about the coordination and funding of settlement services by the Quebec government. These were identified in 2008, by the report of the Bouchard-Taylor Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences (Bouchard & Taylor, 2008). In the section on

integrating immigrants, a key recommendation was to increase government funding for community groups and front-line organizations, in order to overcome what the commission called a “serious deficiency.” Another important recommendation was to “consolidate and develop the existing network of organizations while avoiding a piecemeal approach” to integration (Bouchard & Taylor, 2008, p. 268). In particular, the report recommended increased funding for organizations that work with immigrant women. The QMICC was advised to create an interactive web portal, where information on the resources and services available to newcomers could be centralized. The report also urged the further regionalization of immigration in Quebec, and increased funding to municipalities and organizations that support immigrants outside Montréal, with particular emphasis on Québec City.

Delivery models of settlement services in three major urban centres shows different approaches, which may reflect the geo-political contexts of the cities.

Reflections

This analysis raises several issues, one of which concerns the preparation of settlement workers for practice in the field. Workers should be properly trained, so that they can understand the social and political context, and help their organizations and clients to effectively navigate it. Given that refugees and immigrants are being settled across the country, Schools of Social Work should include courses on immigration and settlement into their curricula. Workers in the

field can seek out professional development programs, such as the Certificate of Forced Migration Studies offered by the Centre for Refugee Studies (CRS) at York University. Information on settlement, aimed at both workers in the field and at the newcomers themselves, is available at www.settlement.org. Up-to-date information on refugee issues and advocacy strategies can be found on the website of the Canadian Council for Refugees (www.ccrweb.ca). As well, the website www.refugeeresearchnetwork.net provides research resources for workers, policy makers, and academics.

This mapping of delivery models of settlement services in three major urban centres shows different approaches, which may reflect the geo-political contexts of the cities. Still, there are issues with each system. Calgary’s two agencies that provide centralized services seem to best reflect the “one-stop shopping” ethos of the federal government’s ideal Integrated Service Delivery model; but the system largely excludes the vital municipal and provincial levels. In addition, the apparent absence of municipal and provincial involvement raises concerns about where local advocacy will come from, if there are federal cuts.

Toronto is the major reception area for immigrants and refugees in Canada, and offers a diverse range of settlement services—so great a range, in fact, that it presents a labyrinth for newcomers to navigate. CIC is moving to address the fragmentation of services in Toronto by organizing collaboration through Local Immigration Partnerships; however, it is unclear what impact this imposed strategy will have on the availability and accessibility of services in the city, particularly in the face of pending cuts. The ending of the federal-provincial funding agreement in 2010, without a new plan in place, has created an unsettled environment for agencies.

Montréal’s settlement services are managed by the province of Quebec through its Ministry of Immigration and Cultural Communities; the federal government provides the funding,

but has no reporting requirements. The fragmentation of the delivery system was recognized as a deficiency by the Bouchard-Taylor Commission, with calls for the consolidation of services and increased funding. There is no evidence yet of a response to these concerns by the provincial government.

All of these models raise concerns related to the tension between centralization, fragmentation, and the pressure for locality. Financial stability is also a concern, particularly as the federal government is moving to address the deficits incurred in the 2008–2009 fiscal period. There is also a lack of research on the impact of different federal/provincial agreements, as well as different service-delivery models. While CIC has been evaluating individual programs, its focus is on efficiency and cost-effectiveness. There is a need for comparative longitudinal studies of the settlement experiences of refugees in urban and rural communities across Canada, in order to evaluate our capacity to effectively provide “safe havens” for those who seek our protection.

References

- Amin, A. (2002). Ethnicity and the multicultural city: Living with diversity. *Environment and Planning A*, 34(6), 959–980.
- Bouchard, G., & Taylor, C. (2008). *Building the future: A time for reconciliation: Report*. Retrieved February 20, 2010, from <http://www.accommodements.qc.ca/documentation/rappports/rapport-final-integral-en.pdf>
- Brown, M.P. (1997). *RePlacing Citizenship: AIDS Activism and Radical Democracy*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Calgary Catholic Immigration Society (CCIS). (2010). *Welcome to Calgary Catholic Immigration Society (CCIS)*. Retrieved February 18, 2010, from <http://www.ccis-calgary.ab.ca>
- Canada. Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC). (1991). *Canada-Quebec Accord relating to immigration and temporary admission of aliens*. Retrieved February 18, 2010, from <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/department/laws-policy/agreements/quebec/can-que.asp>
- . (2008a). *Audit of inland offices – CIC Calgary*. Retrieved February 19, 2010, from <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/audit/calgary.asp#observations>
- . (2008b). *Program evaluations*. Retrieved February 19, 2010, from <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/evaluation/index.asp>
- . (2009a). *Audit of governance – Ontario region*. Retrieved February 18, 2010, from http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/audit/ontario_governance.asp#about
- . (2009b). *Facts and figures 2008 – Immigration overview: Permanent and temporary residents*. Retrieved February 19, 2010, from <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/statistics/facts2008/permanent/12.asp>
- . (2009c). *What we do*. Retrieved February 18, 2010, from <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/department/what.asp>
- Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture. (2010). *East downtown Toronto Local Immigration Partnership: Request for proposals for project research*. Retrieved February 18, 2010, from <http://www.ccvvt.org/pdfs/Request%20for%20Proposal%20for%20East%20Downtown%20LIP.pdf>
- Canadian Council for Refugees. (2010). Bill C-11: Open letter. Retrieved May 16, 2010 from <http://ccrweb.ca/en/bill-c-11-open-letter>
- Community Social Planning Council of Toronto, & Family Service Association Toronto. (2006). *On the front lines of Toronto's immigrant- and refugee-serving sector*. Retrieved February 20, 2010, from <http://www.fsatoronto.com/programs/social/Front%20LinesImmigrRefugeeSector2006.pdf>
- Creese, G. (1998). *Government restructuring and immigrant/refugee settlement work: Bringing advocacy back in*. RIIM Working Paper No. 98–12. Vancouver: Vancouver Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Integration in the Metropolis.
- Este, D. (2010). Immigrant Settlement Workers and Self-Care: A Necessity. *INSCAN*, 23(4), 1–4.
- Federation of Canadian Municipalities. (2009). *Theme report #5: Immigration and diversity in Canadian cities and communities*. Retrieved February 20, 2010, from <http://www.fcm.ca//CMFiles/QofL%20Report%205%20En1JPA-3192009-2422.pdf>
- Ferguson, E. (2009, March 20). Calgary agencies struggle to serve immigrants' needs: Federal funds fail to follow newcomers. *Calgary Herald*, p. B1.

Findhelp Information Services. (2010). *211 Toronto: Community connection*. Retrieved February 18, 2010, from <http://www.211toronto.ca/>

Holston, J. (1999). Spaces of insurgent citizenship. In J. Holston (Ed.), *Cities and Citizenship* (pp. 155–176). Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Kernaghan, K. (2009). Moving towards the virtual state: Integrating services and service channels for citizen-centred delivery. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 71(1), 119–131.

McGrath, S., Moffat, K., Lee, B., & George, U. (2010). *Disciplining community agencies: The pressure to partner*. Unpublished manuscript.

Polèse, M., & Stren, R. (Eds.). (2000). *The Social Sustainability of Cities: Diversity and the Management of Change*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Purcell, M. (2008). *Recapturing Democracy: Neo-liberalization and the Struggle for Alternative Urban Futures*. New York: Routledge.

Quebec Ministry of Immigration and Cultural Communities (QMICC). (2009). *Fiche synthèse sur l'immigration au Québec – Annexe 2008*. Retrieved February 19, 2010, from http://www.micc.gouv.qc.ca/publications/fr/recherches-statistiques/Note_synthese_Immigration.pdf

Richmond, T., & Shields, J. (2005). NGO-government relations and immigrant services: Contradictions and challenges. *Journal of International Migration and Integration / Revue de l'intégration et de la migration internationale*, 6(3-4), 513–526.

Rose, D., & Ray, B. (2000). Landed refugee claimants' first three years in Quebec: Their housing experiences. *Immigration et métropoles*. Volet 2 : Vie de quartier, trajectoires résidentielles, réseaux sociaux et gestion des équipements collectifs. Retrieved February 19, 2010, from http://im.metropolis.net/research-policy/research_content/doc/SynthesefinaleDR.pdf

Smith, A. (2010). CIC's Modernized Approach to Settlement Programming: A Brief Description. *INSCAN*, 23(3), 1–4.

Table de concertation des organismes au service des personnes réfugiées et immigrantes (TCRI). (2010). Retrieved February 19, 2010, from <http://www.tcric.ca/>

Wood, P.K., & Gilbert, L. (2005). Multiculturalism in Canada: Accidental discourse, alternative vision, urban practice. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 29(3), 679–691.

Wood, P.K., McGrath, S., & Young, J.E.E. (2010). *The emotional city: Refugee resettlement in Calgary, Canada*. Unpublished manuscript.

Biographical notes

Susan McGrath is director of the Centre for Refugee Studies and associate professor of Social Work at York University, Toronto. She is also president of the International Association for Studies in Forced Migration and chair of the Board of Directors of the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture. Her current research is focusing on issues of collective trauma and on the social sustainability of programs and public institutions that support refugees and newcomers in Canada. She is the principal investigator of the SSHRC Strategic Knowledge Cluster grant, which is supporting a Canadian and global Refugee Research Network that seeks to generate and mobilize knowledge among scholars, practitioners and policy makers to benefit people who have been forcibly displaced.

Patricia Burke Wood is an associate professor in the Department of Geography, York University, and a former domain leader for Citizenship and Social, Political and Civic Integration at CERIS —the Ontario Metropolis Centre. Her current research concerns diversity, minority rights and citizenship in Canada and in Ireland.

Julie Young is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Geography at York University in Toronto. She completed a masters in Immigration and Settlement Studies at Ryerson University in 2005, and has worked as a researcher in academic, public sector, and non-profit settings. Her dissertation focuses on refugee policy, politics, and advocacy across the Windsor-Detroit border.

Some support provided by Integration Branch, Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

Integration of Newcomers to Newfoundland and Labrador (NL)

Barriers and Challenges

Lan Gien • Rebecca Law

Abstract

Most newcomers to Canada settle in big cities. In recent years, only 1% of immigrants arrived in Atlantic Canada and after a few months in the region, 70% out-migrated to bigger centers. The low attraction and retention rate of newcomers, together with the recent population loss in Newfoundland and Labrador (NL), have had a direct negative economic impact on the province. This study explores the barriers that hinder the successful integration of newcomers to NL. The sample consisted of 50 newcomers who completed a questionnaire that contained open-ended questions, either online or in face-to-face interviews. *Results:* 34% planned to settle in NL, 12% planned to leave, and 54% were undecided. For those who stayed, the most important reasons were quality of life in NL, and being close to their family and friends. For the undecided, the reasons to stay were family and friends; the reasons to leave were better quality of life, and more job opportunities, elsewhere. Overall, work availability was an important factor in the decision to stay or to leave. Other deterrents included poor climate, poor local transportation, lack of essential information about life in Canada, racism and discrimination, isolation, cultural deprivation, a high cost of living, and low pay. These findings have implications for other researchers, for policy makers, and for social workers.

Keywords: Immigrants • newcomers • integration • Newfoundland and Labrador

Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) is facing the prospect of a declining and aging population following a decade of out-migration and population loss (Gilroy, 2005). According to the 2006 Census (Statistics Canada, 2006), the population of Canada as a whole increased by 5.4% in the five-year period of 2001 to 2006; during the same period, however, the population of NL *decreased* by 1.5%. This population loss is further compounded by its low rate of attracting and retaining immigrants, which has dropped since the 1990s—in 2007, more than half left the province (Akbari et al., 2007). This negative population growth contributes to the projected lack of a skilled

workforce, and will likely directly affect NL's economic development.

The single most important factor in influencing immigrants' decision to stay or to leave was the availability of jobs (Gilroy, 2005). Other barriers to successful integration included lack of orientation and skill-matching before immigrating; a low level of settlement support services and social inclusion after arriving in Canada; and lack of adequate recognition of foreign credentials (Akbari, 2008). Although the government of NL recognizes the need to attract more skilled workers and entrepreneurs, it is critical that the province be more successful in integrating

and retaining immigrants, if they are to make a durable contribution.

Unfortunately, there is a paucity of research addressing the integration of newcomers to NL. Although Gilroy explored this issue in 2005, his sample was a small one, consisting mostly of 38 new refugees. To address the need for a more comprehensive study, involving various groups of newcomers, we conducted a multi-part study to provide different perspectives on integration: from newcomers to NL, from immigrants who settled elsewhere in Canada, from those who left NL after living in the province, and from international students. However, here we report only on those findings that concern new newcomers to NL and that will be valuable to various groups: the front-line workers who provide services to newcomers; other researchers; and policy makers looking to formulate strategies to boost immigration and the integration of newcomers.

The population of Canada as a whole increased by 5.4% in the five-year period of 2001 to 2006; during the same period, however, the population of NL decreased by 1.5%.

Method

This survey used both quantitative and qualitative methods. Following ethics approval from the local university, data were collected from February to April 2009.

A “newcomer” was defined as a person born outside of Canada who arrived in Canada 5 years ago or less. Participants were recruited through the provincial settlement agency; through questionnaires distributed at multicultural social

and business activities (such as food and craft fairs, educational workshops, and association meetings); and through word-of-mouth in local ethnic communities. We felt that this variety of venues ensured the representation of various classes of newcomers, including refugees, family class, business class, skilled workers, and provincial nominees. The questionnaire was adapted from Coombs-Thorne & Warren (2007), with additional questions adapted from a survey by the Newfoundland and Labrador Statistics Agency. Open-ended questions were also included, to allow freer expression of ideas and feelings. The questionnaire was well tested for clarity and ease of understanding. Other modes of data collection were also considered, depending on participants’ language and computer abilities. For those with language difficulties, face-to-face interviews were conducted with the assistance of interpreters as needed. Those with better English skills were mailed copies of the questionnaire, with prepaid, stamped, self-addressed envelopes provided for returning the completed forms. And for those with computer skills, the questionnaire was posted online. Once all the questionnaires were completed, the results were assessed using Survey Monkey.

Data analysis: Quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (Windows version). Answers to open-ended questions were analyzed by two researchers, using colour coding to maintain data integrity and to minimize interviewer bias. The results were subjected to constant comparative analysis for categories, constructs, domains, and general themes (Polit & Hungler, 1999).

Results

Fifty-seven respondents completed the questionnaire. However, seven questionnaires were invalid since three were left blank and four were completed by immigrants who had arrived in NL more than five years previously.

Demographic characteristics: Of the remaining 50 valid questionnaires, respondents

were 58% male and 42% female, with a median age of 35-36. Nineteen were refugees (38%), and the remaining thirty-one (62%) were of other immigrant classes. The majority were married (75%); most came from Asia (52%), Africa (20%), and Europe (18%). Sixty-two percent arrived in NL in 2007 and 2008 (26% and 36% respectively), and so their opinions expressed at the time of data collection (2009) reflected their experiences of living in the province for one to two years. Finally, many were highly educated, with 49% reporting an education equal to or greater than the BA degree level. Since only about 12% of NL's general population have completed a university degree (Statistics Canada, 2008), the newcomers' educational achievement was considered a significant stock of human capital.

Those who decided to settle in NL listed the major advantages as the good quality of life—friendly people, low crime rate, safe and quiet environment—followed by “To be close to family and friends.”

The top four reasons for moving to NL were to get a better education (36.2%); to move away from a difficult situation (32%); for family or personal reasons (30%); and because of receiving a job offer or transfer (23.4%). More than 38% of the newcomers received most of their information about immigrating to NL from a relative or friend—making word of mouth the single most important source of information for newcomers.

When asked whether they planned to settle permanently in NL, 54% of respondents were undecided, 12% planned to move away, and

34% planned to stay. This is consistent with Gilroy's findings (2005), but differs from those found by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) in 2002, where more than 50% of newcomers settled in their provinces of arrival.

Advantages of living in NL: Those who decided to settle in NL listed the major advantages as the good quality of life—friendly people, low crime rate, safe and quiet environment—followed by “To be close to family and friends.” Thus, social reasons ranked higher than economic reasons as deciding factors. The undecided group cited the same positive reasons for considering staying. However, that group, and those planning to leave, identified a number of barriers to successful integration—as listed in Table 1.

Barriers and challenges: Table 1 lists responses from participants who rated potential barriers/problems on 5-point Likert scales. Participants were asked: “To what extent do you perceive the following as possible barriers to the successful integration of immigrants into NL?” Responses rated potential problems on 5-point Likert scales, and are grouped under the headings of: “A great deal/somewhat,” “A little/very little,” and “Not applicable.” The N column lists the number of participants who rated each issue.

The information in Table 1 indicates that the biggest perceived barrier to integration was the local economic conditions, followed by lack of information about the immigration process/about living conditions in the province. Until recently, NL had one of the highest unemployment rates in Canada, due to the lack of industry in the province. Even local residents had to move elsewhere to look for work, and newcomers found it even more difficult to find employment. Although the recent oil and mineral developments have generated more jobs, most newcomers were still relatively uninformed about the state of the labour market. In other words, there is a sizable disconnect between the current economic reality and the expectations of the immigrant job seekers. Other barriers included

Table 1
Socio-demographic characteristics of participants (%)

Barriers/problems, organized by degree of importance	N	A great deal/ somewhat	A little/ very little	N/A
Economic conditions	43	67.4	27.9	4.7
Amount of information available for immigrants regarding the immigration process both before and during immigration	39	66.7	28.2	5.1
Differences in language and communication	43	62.8	34.5	2.3
Cultural differences in the job application process, such as resumé writing, the interview process, the job competition process)	40	62.5	35.0	2.5
Employer recognition of credentials such as diplomas, certificates, or international degrees	37	62.2	32.4	5.4
Amount of Canadian work experience employers expect immigrants to have prior to their arrival in NL	42	61.9	33.3	4.8
Information available to employers to help them find immigrant candidates for potential employment	39	61.5	35.9	2.6
Immigrants' knowledge of Canadian business and work practices	42	59.5	38.1	2.4
Employer perceptions of potential training costs associated with hiring immigrants (retraining, upgrading, etc.)	37	59.5	35.1	5.4
Living conditions, such as weather, distance to the rest of Canada	45	57.8	42.2	0.0
Amount of advice and support available through mentor programs, apprenticeships, work terms, etc.	39	56.4	33.3	10.3
Amount of information available to immigrants regarding labour market and available jobs	43	55.8	39.5	4.7
Access to financial services to help pay for education	43	53.5	34.9	11.6
Number of immigrants living in the area who can provide social and cultural support	38	52.6	44.7	2.6
Access to services such as counselling, transportation, schools/education for children	40	50.0	35.0	15.0
Perceived prevalence of racism and discrimination	39	35.9	53.8	10.3

Table 2
Current areas of employment (n=48)

Areas of employment	%
Did not work	52.1
Professional, scientific, or technical	10.4
Health care or social services	8.3
Accommodations	6.3
Government services	4.2

Table 3
Reasons why newcomers were looking for another job (n=34)

Reasons	%
Want work in my area	29.4
Want better pay	26.5
Want advancement	23.5
Want more job security	23.5
Want to find another career	20.7

Note: Respondents could provide more than one response

language and cultural differences, non-recognition of foreign credentials, and lack of Canadian work experience—all of which contributed to newcomers' difficulty in job searches.

1. Employment: Despite being well educated, most participants cited difficulty in searching for employment. Before arriving in NL, 76% of the newcomers were employed; but fewer than 48% of those were working at the time of this study—indicating that some 52% were unable to work. Previous areas of employment were the professional/scientific/technical sectors (18%), health care or social services (12%), education (10%), and government services (10%). All those industries

require a high degree of skill development. Of participants who had not worked before moving to NL, many have been enrolled at educational institutions. Those currently employed were, not surprisingly, working for the most part in the same fields listed in Table 2.

However, regardless of whether they were currently employed, most respondents (75%) were looking for another job—most frequently to work in their area of specialization, since their current job did not fit their qualifications or expertise. Other reasons were looking for better pay, job advancement, more job security and finding another career (Table 3).

The difficulties newcomers faced in finding work are outlined in Table 4. Language problems were highest on the list, followed by non-acceptance of foreign qualifications and work experience outside of Canada, together with lack of Canadian job experience. Newcomers were unable to use their education and their past work experiences—findings that are congruent with those identified in Table 1.

One factor that had a great impact on newcomers' ability to find employment that was consistent with their ability and experience was the acceptability of their credentials. Several previous surveys of immigrants had identified non-recognition of foreign credentials as a serious employment barrier (CIC, 2002). Newcomers were asked if they had contacted any person, organization, educational institution or employer, to see if their credentials would be accepted in NL. Sixteen out of 45 respondents (35.5%) had done so. Of these sixteen, six (37%) had their credentials fully accepted, six (38%) had their credentials partially accepted, and four (25%) found that their credentials were not accepted at all.

2. Lack of information: It was noted that most newcomers had arrived without much of the essential information they needed to deal with life in Canada, either before, during or after arriving in NL (Table 5). Although 55.3% of respondents had received information about how to access educational services such as

Table 4
Newcomers' problems in finding work

Factor	%
Language problems (20/48)	41.7
Qualifications earned outside Canada were not accepted (13/48)	27.1
Lack of enough Canadian work experience (13/48)	27.1
Job experience from outside Canada not accepted (11/48)	22.9
Lack of employment opportunities (7/46)	15.2
Lack of connections in the job market (6/46)	13.0
Lack of family or friends who could help (6/48)	12.5
Transportation problems (4/46)	8.7
Not knowing how to find a job (4/48)	8.3
Lack of job references from Canada (4/48)	8.3
Not being able to find a job in field of expertise (3/46)	6.5
Perceived racism or discrimination (3/47)	6.4
Lack of knowledge about the local community (3/48)	6.3
Not being able to find or afford childcare (2/48)	4.2

Note: Respondents could provide more than one response

schools, colleges, or universities, only 19.1% had received information about how to get their educational or work credentials assessed, or how to obtain Canadian equivalents for international qualifications.

The newcomers' lack of knowledge was clarified in answers to open-ended questions, which included observations on subjects such as the shortage of information on the province's potential, and how newcomers could tap in to the opportunities. Another respondent observed:

Newfoundland and Labrador is less well known than other provinces in Canada such as Ontario, British Columbia or

Quebec. Potential immigrants do not know what they can do for in NL.

Lack of information about the potential in the province and how newcomers could tap to the opportunities.

3. Isolation and cultural deprivation:

Answers to the open-ended questions also revealed other barriers to integration. For instance, many newcomers felt isolated and lonely, cut off from their own people and groups. They missed things related to their culture, such as foods, religious affiliations, and important festivities and holidays. As one respondent noted, there was:

Table 5
Information newcomers received about living in NL either before, during, or after arriving here (n=47)

Type of information	Received information
How to access educational services (schools, colleges, universities)	55.3
How to access medical services	46.8
How to find housing	42.6
How to look for a job	38.3
How to obtain language training	38.3
How to meet basic needs, such as food and clothing	36.2
How to contact immigrant agencies, such as the Association for New Canadians	36.2
How to get educational or work credentials assessed	19.1
How to obtain Canadian equivalents for international qualifications	19.1
Other types of information	6.4

Note: Respondents could provide more than one response

[A] lack of ethnic food and cultural programs, less social and family support compared to other provinces, a lack of an immigrant community such as there is in bigger cities.

As well, newcomers experienced loneliness due to the geographical distance from other parts of Canada or the US: air travel is the only convenient mode of transportation, making it inconvenient and costly to visit friends and relatives. Several participants mentioned:

Geographic isolation/lower accessibility to other parts of the country/world.

Flights between NL and Europe—it’s very expensive *not* to transit via Montréal or Toronto, and very long).

4. High cost of living and low salary:

The higher cost of food, accommodation,

heating, transportation and other living essentials, together with lower salaries and higher taxes in NL, were also deterrents.

5. Poor weather and local public transportation:

Newcomers were also largely dependent on city buses for transportation, and found both schedules and routes inadequate and inconvenient. Often their only alternative was walking—a difficult matter in winter, due to not only to the windy, cold, slushy weather, but also to the poor state of the sidewalks:

Transportation issues...buses...the city doesn’t clean the sidewalks....You have to walk beside the cars in the winter and it’s risky.

In winter the streets are so bad you can’t use them. If you [miss] your bus, you need to wait another half hour for the next one to come.

6. Racial discrimination: Although racism and discrimination were not reported as major barriers to integration (only 6.4% of newcomers mentioned them, as per Table 4), they emerged as a theme in responses to the open-ended questions such as *“Local companies prefer to hire people from NL or at least ones recommended by a Newfoundlander. Such conditions make it hard for an outsider to get a job in a professional field.”* These findings were congruent with those of Lai & Huffey (2009), who commented that systemic discrimination in small communities existed in various forms, and extended to the areas of education, employment, health care, and access to social services.

While jobs are important to newcomers, cultural and social connections are seen as even more crucial.

Discussion

The findings of this study support those of others conducted in small urban and rural communities similar to those in Newfoundland and Labrador (Bernard, 2008; Carter, Morrish & Amoyaw, 2008; Lai & Huffey, 2009; Silvius & Amis, 2005). However, in this study, social reasons—such as family ties and quality of life—ranked higher than economic reasons for settling in NL. The same observation was identified by Kunz (2003), and reiterated by Judy Sgro, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Canada: in a CBC interview in 2004, she acknowledged this new understanding of her department. Although economic integration of immigrants is usually faster in less urban areas (Bernard, 2008), they are often willing to forego the better economic

status that they might achieve in smaller towns, in order to live close to their ethnic community in the bigger cities. As a result, while jobs are important to newcomers, cultural and social connections are seen as even more crucial. It is therefore important that the host community make it possible for newcomers to build a critical mass of vibrant ethnocultural groups that can attract, and support, other immigrants. An active community of that sort will address the humanitarian aspects of settlement by easing the issues of language barriers, isolation, need for information, and networking.

One issue not addressed in this study was family violence and crime; this may be an issue faced by newcomers, as the result of their feelings of social, cultural, and geographical isolation, as well as frustration in their job searches or career advancement, and their perception of racial discrimination. These negative experiences may lead to low-self esteem, which in turn breeds hostility, anger, family discord, abusive relationships, violence, and/or other crimes. Social workers who deal with newcomers should be aware of this potential issue, and have strategies in place to deal with it.

To address the issue of employment in smaller communities, most provinces, including NL, have formulated a Provincial Nominee Program (PNP). This is a program through which the province nominates foreigners and their families for permanent resident status, based on a pre-approved job offer (Wong, 2009). This allows the province to select immigrants according to its specific needs and strategic plan. Although the outcomes of most PNP programs have not yet been evaluated, at least one program, in Manitoba, has been a success (Carter et al., 2008; Silvius & Annis, 2005, 2007). Although PNPs are based on individual contexts, and there is no standard formula for addressing local needs, the lessons and challenges learned in Manitoba may be informative for other provinces. NL, in particular, may gain useful information from it about developing welcoming communities for immigrants.

Implications

The findings of this research will be useful for service providers who deal with immigrants, as well as for other researchers, and for policy makers. Social workers need to be aware of the issues and barriers faced by newcomers, so that their interventions are better able to meet the needs of this group. Although not all necessary interventions are within the scope of social workers, they can at least advocate for the newcomers with all levels of government. They can approach municipal, provincial, and federal bodies, in order to increase their awareness of newcomers' needs, and to attempt to address such matters as the lack of affordable housing, or culturally sensitive health and social services. The social worker can not only link immigrants with relevant social services, but may also be a catalyst in formulating policy that could provide an environment more conducive to their settlement. For example, if social workers make the city more aware of the problems of transportation and walking, that may be the impetus needed to improve sidewalk conditions and bus schedules. Provincial and federal governments can provide better information to newcomers, and increase support for local ethnic groups to make them more active and visible, in order to create a culturally diverse community that invites newcomers to integrate. Obviously, these initiatives require collaboration among all stakeholders: ethnic communities, other community groups, social service providers, and all levels of government. The benefits of these efforts is that they will contribute to the positive experiences of newcomers; and their successful settlement will likely draw other immigrants to Newfoundland and Labrador—which will meet the province's need for a skilled workforce, and for sustainable economic development.

Acknowledgments

This study is funded by the Leslie Harris Centre of Regional Policy and Development, Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador and its funding partner Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

We also appreciate the contributions of Joanne Smith-Young, Renée Lawrence, and Dr. George Klima in conducting this study.

References

- Akbari, A.H. (2008). *Immigrant inflows and their retention rise in Atlantic Canada*. Retrieved from www.atlantic.metropolis.net/index_e.html
- Akbari, A.H., Lynch, S., McDonald, J.T., & Rankaduwa, W. (2007). *Socioeconomic and demographic profiles of immigrants in Atlantic Canada*. Prepared for the Atlantic Metropolis Centre.
- Bernard, A. (2008). *Immigrants in the hinterlands*. Statistics Canada. Catalogue No. 75-001-X. Ottawa.
- Canada. Statistics Canada. (2006). *Census 2006: Population and dwelling counts, for Canada, provinces and territories, 2006 and 2001 censuses*. Catalogue No. 97-550-XWE2006002.
- . (2008). *Highest level of educational attainment for the population aged 25 to 64, percentage distribution (2006) for both sexes, for Canada, provinces and territories*. Ottawa: Author.
- Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC). (2004). *Perfect Strangers*. [Radio broadcast]. Retrieved May 2010 from <http://nb.cbc.ca/features/perfectstrangers/feedback.html>
- Carter, T., Morrish, M., & Amoyaw, B. (2008). Attracting immigrants to smaller urban and rural communities: Lessons learned from the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program. *Journal of International Migration & Integration / Revue de l'intégration et de la migration internationale*, 9, 161–183. Springer Science. doi 10.1007/s12134-008-0051-2
- Canada. Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC). (2002). *CIC, Facts and figures 2001: Immigration overview*. Catalogue No. MP43-333/2002E. Ottawa, Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada.
- Coombs-Thorne, H. & Warren, M. (2007). *Connect, accept, recognize, empower: The integration of immigrants into the Newfoundland and Labrador Workforce*. Prepared by the Association for New Canadians (ANC) for the Foreign Credential Recognition Program (FCR), Government of Canada.
- Gilroy, G. (2005). Goss Gilroy Inc. Management Consultants. *Retention and integration of immigrants in Newfoundland and Labrador: Are we ready?* Final report. Prepared for Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA) and Coordinating Committee on Newcomer Integration.

Kunz, J.L. (2003, April). Social capital: A key dimension of immigrant integration. *Canadian Issues: Immigration Opportunities and Challenges*, 2.

Lai, D., & Huffey, N. (2009). Experience of discrimination by visible minorities in small communities. *Our Diverse Cities / Nos diverses cités*, 6, 124–129.

Polit, D.F., & Hungler, B.P. (1999). *Nursing Research: Principles and Methods*. New York: Lippincott.

Silvius, R., & Annis, R. (2005). Manitoba rural immigration community case studies. *Issues in rural immigration: Lessons, challenges, and responses*, p. 1–18. Rural Development Institute. Brandon University. Brandon, MB.

———. (2007). Reflections on the rural immigration experience in Manitoba's diverse rural communities. *Our Diverse Cities / Nos diverses cités*, 3, 126–133.

Valtonen K. (2001). Social work with immigrants and refugees: developing a participation-based framework for anti-oppressive practice. *British Journal of Social Work*, 31, 995–960.

Wong, I. (2009). *Attracting immigrants to rural communities*. The Monieson Centre, Queen's School of Business. 1–6, Kingston, ON.

Biographical notes

Dr. Lan Gien teaches in undergraduate and graduate nursing programs, and conducts funded research in health issues, multicultural health, program evaluation and aging. She is active in interprofessional education, collaborating with social work in teaching, research, and international development.

Dr. Rebecca Law is an associate professor of Pharmacy and Medicine and is the current president of the Newfoundland and Labrador Health in Pluralistic Societies. She has provided education and conducted research for the ethnic community in St. John's, NL, for over ten years.

The Religious Congregation as Partner in Refugee Resettlement

An Overview of Theory and Practice for Social Workers

Nicole Ives · Jill Witmer Sinha

Abstract

Refugees who resettle in Canada face many challenges, including learning a new language, finding a place to live, familiarizing themselves with a new culture, and learning new ways of cooking, communicating, and transportation. They must develop strategies for becoming economically self-sufficient, and may also have to address mental-health issues. In this task of integration, many partners can help the refugees learn how to participate in the economic, social, cultural, and political life of their new country. Religious congregations often provide social services to communities, either on their own, or in partnership with other congregations, or with secular agencies. Serving refugees is a long-standing tradition, and includes giving sanctuary as well as providing informal and formal resettlement services. Congregations offer an excellent source of social capital for refugees, since they provide relationships that may approximate the networks of family and friends that refugees have lost. This article focuses on the religious congregation as an agent for facilitating refugee integration and resettlement, and on how social workers can utilize these community-based resources.

Keywords: Refugee resettlement · sponsorship · religious congregations · integration

Refugees who resettle in Canada face many challenges, including learning a new language, finding a place to live, familiarizing themselves with a new culture, and learning new ways of cooking, communicating, and transportation. They must develop strategies for becoming economically self-sufficient, and may also have to address mental-health issues. In this task of integration, many partners can help the refugees learn how to participate in the economic, social, cultural, and political life of their new country (Berry, 1992, 2002; Boswell, 2003).

A variety of factors—micro, meso, and macro—shape refugees' experiences in resettlement

and integration (Ives, 2007; Mestheneos & Ioannidi, 2002; Weinstein, Sarnoff, Gladstone & Lipson, 2000). Micro factors include culture (including language and religion), employment, and social support. On the meso level, institutional settings—such as resettlement and public-welfare agencies, ethnic community organizations, and religious congregations—can provide formal resettlement assistance and resources (Beiser & Johnson, 2003; Ives, Sinha & Cnaan, 2010). Macro-level issues in resettlement include the host country's ideologies in terms of its economy, migration policies, and social welfare system. In the context of situational and human factors, how refugees address challenges

that arise on all these intersecting levels can hinder or facilitate their participation in the new society. Economic participation is defined in terms of relationship to the labour market, including being employed, striving for higher education, or undergoing training to improve job marketability. Social participation is conceptualized as being part of inter- and intra-group relationships and interactions (Valtonen, 1998, 1999). Cultural participation involves activities that preserve “ethnocultural integrity,” keeping newcomers in touch with the culture of their country of origin (Valtonen, 1999), as well as introducing them to the host country’s culture. And political participation includes civic activism or awareness, such as becoming a citizen, voting, joining a political organization, and being aware of social and political issues (Valtonen, 1999).

Canadian congregations responded to the human-rights violations in Central America in the 1980s by providing physical protection for political refugees who had earlier fled to Canada, and were now facing deportation back to their own countries.

There are many ways for social workers to assist refugees in all four areas. This article focuses particularly on the religious congregation as an agent for integration, and on how social workers can use these community-based resources. We highlight how social workers can utilize the community-based resources of congregations and address challenges within the refugee resettlement process.


Congregations often provide social services to communities on their own, or in partnership with other congregations, or with secular agencies (Axinn & Stern, 2007; Hick, 2010). While many such programs serve only (or primarily) their own congregations, they often engage in community outreach as well. In a 2001 census of almost 1,400 congregations in Philadelphia, it was found that the programs they offered benefited, on average, about 33% more non-members than members (Cnaan & Boddie, 2001). Congregation-based services range from prison ministries, social advocacy, programs for specific populations, housing, substance-abuse prevention, food pantries, and other community projects, as well as prayer groups and religious education (Barnes, 2005; Billingsley, 1995). In addition to providing such services directly, congregations often facilitate access to other community resources through referrals and networking (Denton, 2003; Martin & Martin, 2002).

Congregations have a long history of services to those in dire need: churches of various kinds have offered physical protection, commonly referred to as sanctuary. North American congregations have helped many refugees, such as the Jewish NGOs who helped to resettle Jews fleeing the Holocaust (Nichols, 1988). In the mid-1970s, congregations organized resettlement assistance for refugees fleeing Vietnam (Burwell, Hill & Van Wicklin, 1986). Canadian congregations responded to the human-rights violations in Central America in the 1980s by providing physical protection for political refugees who had earlier fled to Canada, and were now facing deportation back to their own countries; the churches also provided material, psychosocial, and legal assistance (García, 2006; Lippert, 2005). Other incidents of sanctuary abound in Canada: Lippert documented 36 cases of sanctuary during the 1983–2003 period.

Religious congregations are also involved in more resource-intensive resettlement tasks, including private sponsorship (Denton, 2003; Ives, Sinha & Cnaan, 2010). In Canada, the

majority of refugee-sponsoring entities are congregations or their affiliates (Derwing & Mulder, 2003; Indra, 1988). Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), in its *Immigration Act* of 1976, introduced sponsorship as a mechanism for groups to directly help to resettle refugees, outside of the government-assisted program (Treviranus & Casasola, 2003). Sponsorship involves formal assistance in terms of providing information, material and emotional support, housing assistance, cash assistance, paperwork/document assistance, and in-kind donations, such as language tutoring, furniture, shelter, clothing, and so forth (Lamba & Krahn, 2003). Since then, the sponsorship program was renewed in 2002 under the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*. (Information regarding CIC’s refugee sponsorship program is available online at <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/sponsor/index.asp>.)

[Refugees were] found to have income that was higher than minimum wage, greater proficiency in English, more employment benefits (such as health coverage and retirement plans), and greater overall opportunities for upward mobility.



The small body of evidence available on congregation-based sponsorship suggests that such refugees benefit in crucial ways. In the US, for example, they were found to have income that was higher than minimum wage, greater proficiency in English, more employment benefits (such as health coverage and retirement plans), and greater

overall opportunities for upward mobility (Breslow, Haines, Philipson & Williamson, 1997; Ives, 2005, 2007). Conversely, studies in Canada found that refugees with limited proficiency in French or English were likely to be employed in low-wage labour, to have few or no skills, and to have very little upward mobility (Boyd & Cao, 2009; Krahn, Derwing, Mulder & Wilkinson, 2000). Although there is scant evidence to analyze which characteristics of sponsorship are most beneficial for integrating refugee populations, it is clear that caring, well-resourced, and well-connected sponsors support desirable outcomes.

Partnering with religious congregations

The definition of a religious congregation is a cohesive group of people that meets regularly for the primary purpose of worship, at a designated place, and that has an identified religious leader, an official name, and some formal structure that conveys its purpose and identity (McGrew & Cnaan, 2006). In organizational terms, congregations consist of a network of voluntary and potentially reciprocal relationships, which can offer unique benefits in terms of providing linkages for refugees in the four areas of integration. However, the lack of evaluation literature on this topic requires us to borrow from related areas of empirical inquiry. Literature on ethnic congregations and their role among recent immigrants provides a theoretical starting place, provided that two assumptions are made: a) that essential similarities exist between immigrants already living in a new country, and refugees just arriving; and b) that the benefits for refugees connected to a religious congregation are similar to those of immigrants in the same situation.

If these assumptions hold true, the literature on ethnic congregations and immigrants can plausibly explain why congregations offer specialized resources that can facilitate refugee integration. For immigrants, membership in a

congregation—particularly one shared with people from the same or a similar ethnic group—provides a sense of “home,” with familiar food, language, and cultural traditions, as well as the real possibility of making friends. Even among non-immigrant congregations, several researchers have suggested that congregations can serve immigrants as social and communal hubs, in addition to their function as sources of religious education and worship (Ebaugh & Chafetz, 2000; Handy & Cnaan, 1999).

The theory of social capital suggests that congregations provide both “bonding” and “bridging” social opportunities.

In addition to providing a dual context for socialization and religious activities, the network of individuals that comprises a congregation can also facilitate access to social networks outside the congregation, and help refugees with the many necessary transitions of resettlement (Portes, 1995). This concept in the literature, about congregations as sources of social capital, highlights the potential benefits of such sponsorship and services. The theory of social capital suggests that congregations provide both “bonding” and “bridging” social opportunities. Bonding capital is characterized by interactions and relationships that reinforce a common identity and exclude outsiders; it is most likely to be found within families or members of a group. Bridging, in contrast, extends across more diverse and weakly connected social spheres, such as business associates or friends from different ethnic groups. The latter is obviously more necessary to help refugees to transcend their own immediate ethnic and family

networks. Weisinger and Salipante (2005) observed that bonding social capital facilitates bridging social capital, which is particularly helpful in non-religious settings for tasks such as finding or changing jobs (Bramadat, 2005; Putnam, 2000).

As a network of individuals who share bonding capital and can provide access to bridging capital, congregations are well suited to working with refugees, both formally and informally. Informal assistance might include helping newcomers with financial assistance, material donations, basic needs such as housing and food, transportation to appointments, locating an interpreter; and might also include job applications, learning interview skills and workplace practices, enrolling in schools, and applying for permanent residency or citizenship. In addition, congregations also offer opportunities for social gatherings and emotional support (Beiser & Johnson, 2003; Derwing & Mulder, 2003; Ives, Sinha & Cnaan, 2010; World Relief, n.d.). More formal assistance includes actual sponsorship, and more resource-intensive, long-term investments, such as language tutoring programs.

From the perspective of supporting integration, one could assert that congregation-based groups can offer a combination of resources far less likely to occur either through public resettlement agencies, which have limited resources and high case loads, or through private sponsorship by a single individual or family. Congregations can theoretically provide three major benefits to refugees:

- Access to, and support from, a wide range of networked individuals, often including some with experience of the very aspects of the new society that newcomers most need help with: knowledge of immigration procedures and processes, awareness of inter- and intra-group cultural activities, and employment opportunities.
- Rootedness in the local community, together with networking and referrals access to

community-based and denominational resources (Sikkink & Hernandez, 2003).

- Frequent opportunities for social interaction, which support the newcomers’ attempts to join networks, and also help with their new language skills.

Congregations, even the smallest, usually offer meetings on a monthly, if not a weekly basis—more so if refugees participate in regular religious activities. These frequent encounters with others offer chances to practice language skills, build relationships, and ask for needed items or help. From an agency perspective, engagement with local congregations could provide social workers with knowledge about community resources that they could share with their clients.

Frequent encounters with others offer chances to practice language skills, build relationships, and ask for needed items or help.

Consider how congregation-based sponsorship might support integration in the four domains. In the task of finding employment, congregations offer access to a wide range of individuals who have specialized knowledge about local job opportunities, and who may be able to provide referrals (bridging capital). Congregations also offer frequent opportunities for social gatherings, though these are most likely to focus on the culture of the host society; they may not support refugees in preserving their own ethnocultural integrity and customs. And many congregations can offer knowledge about access to the political domain and the basics of civic engagement,

through their announcements about subjects such as town meetings, local task forces, and voter registration (Handy & Greenspan, 2009).

Local congregations that are connected to a national infrastructure have still greater access to a wider set of social networks, giving them opportunities to broaden refugees’ circle of acquaintances, and provide resources, support, and mutual aid, as well as access to jobs and other benefits (Foley & Hoge, 2007). This is certainly a strength. However, other research raises concerns about the social services provided by congregations. In the study alluded to earlier, of 1,392 congregations in Pennsylvania, 129 provided some type of refugee programming as part of their larger community outreach ministries (Ives, Sinha & Cnaan, 2010). Data revealed that links to a particular refugee population, through language, ethnicity, or congregation members’ migration experiences, appeared to shape congregational engagement in a particular time period with a particular population, but these programs were not necessarily sustained once the crisis in the area of origin had ended. These findings confirmed those of other studies (such as Chaves & Tsitsos, 2001; Twombly, 2002), which found that a congregation’s fluidity—in terms of its membership and the voluntary nature of its services—suggest that such groups are better suited to short-term projects. Care should be taken in assessing whether a congregation has sufficient resources to commit to projects that require the prolonged support of recipients.

Implications for social work practice

We have presented theoretical and empirical evidence calling for specialized resources and identifying the potential limits of congregation-based sponsorship and support for refugee integration. The fact remains that many social workers are becoming increasingly involved in practice settings

where they work with refugees directly—such as a resettlement agency, or a community group in areas with significant refugee populations. In light of these trends, and given the strengths and concerns noted above, we offer several suggestions for social workers to better partner with congregations.

First, social workers who work with resettlement agencies should seriously consider recruiting congregations, particularly if the goal is formal support such as sponsorship. Information about what types of services a congregation provides to refugees, and what its characteristics are—such as ethnicity or denomination—can help social workers to focus their efforts on those most likely to be interested in assisting refugees, and most able to do so. Ideally, social workers could concentrate on cultivating long-term relationships with particular denominations or congregations, with a view to developing resource-intensive, multi-year commitments. Such targeted approaches, combined with ongoing support, would constitute a far more efficient use of resources than continually contacting a range of churches and/or organizations. We suggest targeting congregations that have been involved with resettlement efforts in the past, or that have other linkages with a refugee group, such as language, ethnicity, or a shared country of origin (Ives, Sinha & Cnaan, 2010).

Second, significant technical support may be required for congregations that work with refugees (Derwing & Mulder, 2003). Social workers are well suited to develop training for congregational partners, particularly in aspects such as cultural competency, skill sets designed for specific issues, and the immediate needs of recent refugees (Yan, 2006). Congregations may need training in supporting refugees and their sponsors when discussing and negotiating cultural differences, and in supporting ethnocultural integrity. And if a sponsorship experience is particularly challenging, congregations may

also need emotional support or mediation assistance (Derwing & Mulder).

Third, the social work research community can support resettlement by systematically evaluating congregational resettlement programs that provide informal or formal support and services for refugees, the types and duration of the services they provide, and the long-term outcomes of congregational partnerships. Such studies, including formative and process evaluations, would give local and national resettlement agencies much useful information, and might uncover areas of need that are not yet being adequately addressed. Outcome studies could identify whether supports by congregations are meeting refugee settlement goals. This type of information would allow oversight entities to assess which programs are effective and beneficial to long-term integration, and also to assess whether different refugee communities face particular challenges, such as limited language skills or disabilities. Social workers and congregations could then tailor the services they provide.

Resettlement and integration are complex, multi-system processes, so efforts to identify, engage, and support a variety of local agents, including congregations, seems a wise investment. Congregations offer an excellent source of bonding and bridging social capital to refugees, providing relationships that may approximate the network of family and friends that refugees have lost. Research also shows that their support appears to correlate with newcomers being able to acquire language skills faster, and to obtain higher wages and more benefits in their employment.

In terms of sponsorship, Lanphier (2003) found that a key factor in a sponsoring network's success was its ability to "forge institutional linkages, typically through facilitating access to services crucial to several stages of the [sponsorship] cycle." (p. 246). The intergenerational nature of most congregations, and their ability to generously offer many types of informal support, suggest

that congregations should be given serious consideration as a natural ally in supporting refugees' resettlement and integration.

References

Axinn, J., & Stern, M. (2007). *Social Welfare: A History of the American Response to Need* (7th ed.). New Jersey: Allyn & Bacon.

Barnes, S. (2005). Black church culture and community action. *Social Forces*, 84(2), 967–994.

Beiser, M., & Johnson, P. (2003). Sponsorship and resettlement success. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 4, 203–215.

Berry, J.W. (1992). Acculturation and adaptation in a new society. *International Migration / Migrations internationales / Migraciones Internacionales*, 30 (Special issue), 69–85.

———. (2002). Conceptual approaches to acculturation. In K. M. Chun, P. B. Organista & G. Marin (Eds.), *Acculturation: Advances in theory, measurement, and applied research* (pp. 17–37). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Billingsley, A. (1995). The Black church as a social service institution. *Black Caucus: Journal of the NABSW*, 1(4), 1–5.

Boswell, C. (2003). *European migration policies in flux: Changing patterns of inclusion and exclusion*. Mississauga, ON: Wiley-Blackwell.

Boyd, M., & Cao, X. (2009). Immigrant language proficiency, earnings, and language policies. *Canadian Studies in Population*, 36, 63–86.

Bramadat, P.A. (2005). Religion, social capital, and “the day that changed the world.” *Journal of International Migration and Integration / Revue de l'intégration et de la migration internationale*, 6, 201–217.

Breslow, M., Haines, D., Philipsen, D., & Williamson, I. (1997). Richmond's refugees: Understanding the interaction between refugees and their new communities. *Migration World*, 25, 31–34.

Burwell, R.J., Hill, P., & Van Wicklin, J.F. (1986). Religion and refugee resettlement in the United States: A research note. *Review of Religious Research*, 27, 356–366.

Chaves, M., & Tsitsos, W. (2001). Congregations and social services: What they do, how they do it, and with whom. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 30, 660–683.

Cnaan, R.A., & Boddie, S.C. (2001). Philadelphia census of congregations and their involvement in social service delivery. *Social Service Review*, 75, 559–580.

Denton, T.R. (2003). Understanding private refugee sponsorship in Manitoba. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 4, 257–271.

Derwing, T.M., & Mulder, M. (2003). The Kosovar sponsoring experience in Northern Alberta. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 4, 217–236.

Ebaugh, H.R., & Chafetz, J.S. (2000). *Religion and the new immigrants: Continuities and adaptations in immigrant congregations*. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press.

Foley, M.W., & Hoge, D.R. (2007). *Religion and the new immigrants*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

García, M.C. (2006). *Seeking Refuge: Central American Migration to Mexico, the United States, and Canada*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Handy, F., & Cnaan, R.A. (1999). Religious nonprofits. In K. Banting, *The Nonprofit Sector in Canada* (pp. 69–105). Kingston, Canada: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Handy, F., & Greenspan, I. (2009). Immigrant volunteering: A stepping stone to integration? *Non-profit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 38(6), 956–982.

Hick, S. (2010). *Social Work in Canada: An introduction* (3rd ed.). Toronto, ON: Thompson Educational.

Indra, D.M. (1998). An analysis of the Canadian private sponsorship program for Southeast Asian refugees. *Ethnic Groups*, 7, 153–172.

Ives, N., Witmer Sinha, J., & Cnaan, R. (2010). Who is welcoming the stranger? Exploring faith-based service provision to refugees in Philadelphia. *Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought*, 29, 71–89.

Ives, N. (2007). More than a “good back”: Looking for integration in refugee resettlement. *Refuge*, 24(2), 54–63.

———. (2005). Understanding Bosnian refugee integration and how it differs by country of resettlement: Denmark and the United States of America. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 66 (02), 761 (Publication number AAT 3165702).

Krahn, H., Derwing, T., Mulder, M., & Wilkinson, L. (2000). Educated and underemployed: Refugee integration into the Canadian labour market. *Journal of International Migration and Integration / Revue de l'intégration et de la migration internationale*, 1, 59–84.

- Lamba, N.K., & Krahn, H. (2003). Social capital and refugee resettlement: The social networks of refugees in Canada. *Journal of International Migration and Integration / Revue de l'intégration et de la migration internationale*, 4, 335–360.
- Lanphier, M. (2003). Sponsorship: Organizational, sponsor, and refugee perspectives. *Journal of International Migration and Integration / Revue de l'intégration et de la migration internationale*, 4, 237–256.
- Lippert, R. (2005). Rethinking sanctuary: The Canadian context, 1983–2003. *International Migration Review*, 39, 381–406.
- Martin, E.P., & Martin, J.M. (2002). *Spirituality and the Black Helping Tradition in Social Work*. Washington, DC: NASW Press.
- McGrew, C.C., & Cnaan, R.A. (2006). Finding congregations: Developing conceptual clarity in the study of faith-based social services. *Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Social Work*, 25(3/4), 19–37.
- Mestheneos, E., & Ioannidi, E. (2002). Obstacles to refugee integration in EU states. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 15, 304–320.
- Mooney, M. (2007). The Catholic Church's institutional responses to immigration: From supranational to local engagement. In P. Hondagneu-Sotelo (Ed.), *Religion and Social Justice for Immigrants* (pp. 157–171). New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Nichols, J.B. (1988). *The Uneasy Alliance: Religion, Refugee Work, and US Foreign Policy*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Park, K. (1998). The religious construction of sanctuary provision in two congregations. *Sociological Spectrum*, 18, 393–421.
- Portes, A. (1995). Economic sociology and the sociology of immigration. In A. Portes, (Ed.), *Economic Sociology of Immigration* (pp. 19–48). New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Putnam, R. (2000). *Bowling alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Sikkink, D., & Hernandez, E. I. (2003). *Religion Matters: Predicting Schooling Success Among Latino Youth*. Notre Dame, IN: Institute for Latino Studies, University of Notre Dame.
- Treviranus, B., & Casasola, M. (2003). Canada's private sponsorship of refugees program: A practitioners' perspective of its past and its future. *Journal of International Migration and Integration / Revue de l'intégration et de la migration internationale*, 4, 177–202.
- Twombly, E.C. (2002). Religious versus secular human service organizations: Implications for public policy. *Social Science Quarterly*, 83, 947–961.
- Valtonen, K. (1999). The societal participation of Vietnamese refugees: Case studies in Finland and Canada. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 25, 469–491.
- . (1998). Resettlement of Middle Eastern refugees in Finland: The elusiveness of integration. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 11, 39–60.
- Van Tubergen, F. (2006). Religious affiliation and attendance among immigrants in eight Western countries. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 45, 1–22.
- Weinstein, H.M., Sarnoff, R. H., Gladstone, E.A., & Lipson, J.G. (2000). Physical and psychological health issues of resettled refugees in the United States. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 13, 303–327.
- Weisinger, J.Y., & Salipante, P.F. (2005). A grounded theory for building ethnically bridging social capital in voluntary organizations. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 34, 29–55.
- World Relief (n.d.). *Good Neighbor Guide* (A resource manual providing information and access to resources for communities entities interested in working with refugee families).
- Yan, Y. (2006). *New Americans, New Promise: A Guide to the Refugee Journey in America*. St. Paul, Minnesota: Fieldstone Alliance.

Biographical notes

Nicole Ives is an assistant professor at the School of Social Work, McGill University. Her research interests include refugee re-settlement practice and policy, comparative migration policy, and the role of faith-based organizations in resettlement. She is a Fellow of the Program for Religion and Social Policy Research, University of Pennsylvania.

Jill Witmer Sinha is an assistant professor, Rutgers, State University of New Jersey's School of Social Work. Her research interests include leadership development in nonprofit organizations, youth development risks and assets, and faith-based organizations and social services provision. She is a Fellow of the Program for Religion and Social Policy Research, University of Pennsylvania.

Settlement Experiences in a Small City

Voices of Family-class Immigrants, and of Settlement Workers

Julie Drolet • Jeanette Robertson • Wendy Robinson

Abstract

All immigrant groups rely on health, education, and social services, and social workers play a key role in the delivery of direct and essential services. This article shares original research findings from a community-based study that investigates the settlement experiences of family-class immigrants in a small Canadian city, Kamloops, BC, and also of veteran settlement workers and social work practitioners in the community. The research team consisted of social work educators, practitioners, and student research assistants in social work. The methodology employed for this investigation is exploratory and descriptive, and is guided by a mixed method research design. The blend of key informant interviews, focus groups, and PhotoVoice research methods provided a comprehensive response to the research question. Findings reveal both the importance of social supports and services in helping immigrants to settle and integrate, as well as the need for collaboration between service providers in order to better address systemic barriers. The conclusion is an urgent need for all social workers to become better informed about the needs of newcomers.

Keywords: Settlement • integration • immigration • small city • social work

All immigrant groups rely on health, education, and social services, and social workers play a key role in both delivering those services, and promoting human rights. This article, based on original findings, investigated the settlement experiences of family-class immigrants in the small Canadian city of Kamloops, British Columbia (BC). The research team for this topic included social workers, educators, practitioners, and student researchers, from two local institutions: Thompson Rivers University (TRU), and Kamloops Immigrant Services (KIS). The latter is the primary not-for-profit organization in the city, and delivers a broad range of programs and services; its goal is to help

immigrants, visible minorities, and first-generation Canadians and their families to become full and equal members of society (KIS, 2009). The study uses a community-based research approach to study the short- and long-term strategies that address the aspirations of immigrants, laying the foundations to nurture, support, and realize their potential. The goal of this study is to showcase the settlement challenges faced by family-class immigrants in smaller communities outside the major metropolitan areas. It is imperative for social workers to better understand the integration experiences of newcomers, in order to better serve them.

The presence of family and friends significantly shapes the destination experiences of immigrants on their arrival in Canada.

Literature review

Over the past few years, both the federal and provincial governments have undertaken collaborative initiatives to attract immigrants to Canada's smaller cities. In the past, newcomers predominantly settled in larger cities such as Toronto, Montréal and Vancouver. In the case of British Columbia, every year more than 40,000 immigrants move there to start a new life. BC is a large province, and settlement experiences can be very different from one community to another. WelcomeBC initiatives have a twofold purpose: to help immigrants to access a wide variety of settlement and integration services, and to ensure that BC communities have the capacity to welcome immigrants. WelcomeBC provides a comprehensive array of settlement, integration, and welcoming community services, and sends the message that everyone benefits when all community members, old and new, can participate fully in the local economies and community life. The Welcoming and Inclusive Communities and Workplaces Program recognizes that the goal of integration is a two-way process:

Integration is the term used to describe the process of enfolded and involving immigrants in their new community. Integration is a two-way process that involves commitment on the part of newcomers to adapt to life in Canada, as well as commitment on the part of Canadians to adapt to new people and cultures (National Working Group on Small Centre Strategies, 2007, p. 66).

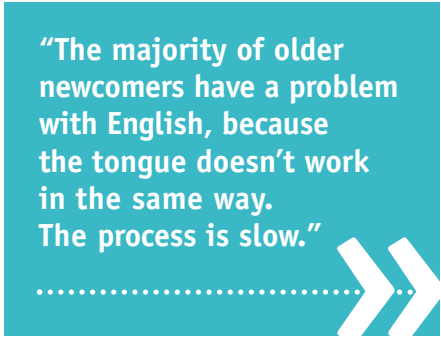
For the social work profession, and for workers who serve immigrant populations, the challenge is to help newcomers integrate. Settlement services can be viewed as an important investment (Fontana, 2003, p. 2). "In fact, the success of the Canadian approach to integration is attributed to a large extent to the extensive network of local service delivery partners" (CIC, 2001, p. 16). In most cases, these services are provided by settlement workers at third-party organizations, and are often available in the newcomers' own languages. Several studies have shown that most (though not all) immigrants base their choice of destination in the foreign land first on the presence of kinship and ethnic networks, and then on potential employment opportunities. For example, Settles (2001) argues that "from a family and individual perspective being at home can mean a variety of different statuses and experiences" (p. 627). And Sherrell (2005) found that the presence of family and friends significantly shapes the destination experiences of immigrants on their arrival in Canada. Based on field research with Kosovar refugees in small- or medium-sized BC cities, Sherrell found that settling extended families together is an important strategy—one that may well shape the families' likelihood of staying in the community (p. 82). "Family and friends provide networks of support during the initial stages of settlement as well as on-going contacts and resources, at least in principle, thereafter" (Sherrell, p. 82).

Methodology

The data for this research were collected between January and August 2008, using three qualitative methods: interviews with key informants, focus groups, and PhotoVoice. The research team chose these methods in consultation with a community advisory committee, to best elicit the voices of the respondents—family-class immigrants, and those who deliver services to them—in a creative and respectful manner. Social work

practitioners, health service providers, settlement workers, educators, and local officials familiar with the settlement needs of immigrants, were interviewed about their experiences. For the immigrants, focus groups were preferred to individual interviews, in order to encourage interaction between the respondents, in the hope of obtaining insight that might not otherwise have been accessible. Participants were asked to describe their settlement experiences, their needs and challenges in the setting of a small city, and what improvements could be made to enhance their integration. Nine key informant and four focus group interviews were facilitated, and respondents were invited to participate in PhotoVoice.

“The majority of older newcomers have a problem with English, because the tongue doesn’t work in the same way. The process is slow.”



Findings of the study

Factors that were identified as important for successful settlement and integration of newcomers included opportunities for employment, business, and education; the presence of family and friends, as well as established ethnic and religious communities; the availability of language services such as ESL training and translation; access to health care; affordable housing; and—last but not least—a welcoming host population. The retention issues that were identified were affordability of basic life needs; accessibility to services both for themselves and for their children (health care, education); mild weather patterns; safety,

community openness and acceptance; and physical proximity to services, employment and leisure activities. In terms of challenges, newcomers specifically identified issues such as finding employment, having their credentials recognized, and meeting the new country’s education and qualification requirements. They also indicated that in order to facilitate understanding and cooperation, it would be useful if information about their diverse cultural norms could be given to service providers, such as community, health care, and social workers. Several participants suggested that more community programs and initiatives to welcome newcomers are needed. As well, greater collaboration between organizations such as KIS and other community initiatives and ethnic/cultural groups would be helpful. That said, all respondents emphasized the crucial services and supports provided by KIS.

In terms of the benefits of settling in a small community rather than a large one (such as Vancouver), respondents offered the following comments:

Kamloops is cheaper than a bigger city. That’s the biggest thing. In a bigger city, you need at least two cars. Everything is closer in Kamloops. As well, a bigger city has higher housing prices, and no jobs. In Kamloops, there are good jobs, house prices are low, everything is lower. And there’s less crime. Big city big crime, small city small crime. You know everyone in Kamloops, in a small city. Different lifestyle in small city. When I moved here I couldn’t speak one word of English.

I know where everything is in Kamloops. In a big city, it’s too hard to go places. Kamloops is it is dry, not too rainy; Vancouver has too much rain. The weather in Kamloops is very good. My children have gone to a different city, but Kamloops is friendly. Happy face. Big city, no. Nobody has time for each other in the big city. In Kamloops you drive nice and slow, in the big city you drive fast.

“I don’t know what I would have done without Kamloops Immigrant Services. They helped me to adapt so much.”

I know where everywhere is, especially where to find materials to build a house. I know everything. It is easy for me.

Most respondents stressed the critical role of employment and income, even though the initial work experiences of some newcomers were characterized by a lack of well-paying jobs, a lack of recognition of their credentials, and a lack of decent work opportunities.

You leave a well-paying job back home, and then you can’t find a job in the field you were in. There’s no evaluation, your degree is worth nothing, so you have to upgrade your degree [by going] to school—which you have no money for, because education is so expensive here. So your dreams kind of die down when you come here.

It is discrimination. The experience abroad in your own country doesn’t count, you need Canadian experience. Ten years should allow you to show what you know. Why? If you say you have experience, you need to know the job. A piece of paper is just a piece of paper. It’s frustrating.

Understanding the new culture can be difficult due to language and communication barriers, particularly amongst older immigrants. As one respondent put it, “it takes patience. You come here, and they have to respect you. But you need to respect the new culture. So both sides have to be patient.” Another observed that “the majority of older newcomers have a problem with English, because the

tongue doesn’t work in the same way. The process is slow.” Time constraints imposed for ESL classes was seen to be a limitation. Some respondents suggested that not knowing English well is more difficult in a small community, because of the lack of ethnic diversity. As one respondent noted, “You can’t customize your English course for everybody.” Another stated that: “Once you get here, you must adapt or leave. If you don’t speak English, you leave.” Another communications issue is that medical practitioners must often rely on family members to translate for their patients, due to a lack of interpretation services. One practitioner noted that there have been cases when health care professionals have confused grief with pain. “There is no focus on the cultural and spiritual dimensions of patient care. We need workers who are better informed about ethnic differences, so that we do not project Western values onto the immigrant population.” In addition to this lack of cultural competence, respondents expressed concern that many established physicians do not accept new patients. This means that immigrants must rely on walk-in medical clinics to address their health needs.

The findings highlight the fact that the settlement process is an ongoing one, which cannot be pinned down to a specific period. Settlement needs change over time, as individuals adapt to their new surroundings. As one respondent commented:

Initially it’s like a honeymoon, they are happy. That slowly changes, and other issues like employment [arise]: sometimes women get jobs, and men don’t—this can lead to frustration, family violence, issues with the kids. At school there’s often a communication gap, because parents don’t speak the language; so parents are concerned about the changes in their children. Some start feeling lonely, want to sponsor their family, but can’t afford to. They have to get two or three jobs to sponsor their parents. Initially they need

Settlement needs change over time, as individuals adapt to their new surroundings.



to put food on the table, so they take any job. Then it starts to bother them that they went to school for so long, and now they can't find suitable work. So they start thinking about getting better jobs, they start thinking about moving.

Many respondents identified the impact of unmet needs on family cohesion. Parents stressed the need for school, leisure activities, and future employment for their children, in order to keep them in the community. One newcomer stated:

My kids are growing up here, but there are no second-language options for our children in Kamloops. Look at Vancouver—there are so many options there for schooling, for learning to read and write. I don't see myself [staying] here for more than two years, because the children can't seriously learn to read and write here.

And another respondent explained:

My kids are grown now; one already has a degree. They don't want to stay in Kamloops, where there are no jobs, so they go to the bigger cities. You can't make them stay.

Other supports frequently cited as vital to address newcomers' unmet needs include strategies for building more awareness and respect for diverse cultures among citizens of the mainstream society and the professionals who work with newcomers; for providing assistance and support to immigrants dealing with housing and medical services; and for better access to information regarding social

services. Many respondents expressed appreciation for the supports provided by KIS, such as this newcomer:

I don't know what I would have done without Kamloops Immigrant Services. They helped me to adapt so much. I learned English, I learned about my rights, I learned about different cultures, and about other immigrants who didn't speak English and were in the same situation as me. For eight months, this place has really helped me, especially learning English and to know my rights.

However, a number of respondents also expressed concern for the organization's shortage of staff and financial resources. Settlement workers also confirmed the challenges of working in small communities: as one put it, "in a smaller city, a settlement worker wears many hats." Another pointed out that cutbacks have made meeting clients increasingly difficult:

I used to do a lot of outreach work, because some clients can't come here, so we have to go to them. But now, with rising gas prices, that has been cut down. With the funding we get, we're not allowed to escort people, so our outreach services have been cut back. There are many clients I don't reach, because they can't afford to come here.

Violence in the family: I see the spouse, I see other relatives. It's very challenging when I'm interpreting for both of them, so I try to tell them "in the courts I can't do that." I have to let them know that's a conflict of interest if I'm interpreting for one and then for the other. But when they come and see me at work, the confidentiality issue becomes a big challenge. (Settlement Worker)

Discussion

In the context of the settlement experiences of family-class immigrants in a small city, the

importance of employment, health, education, and social services cannot be stressed enough. This research indicates that much more emphasis should be placed on those aspects, since they demonstrate that settlement needs are ongoing—they range from immediate needs, to transitional needs, to long-term needs. Accordingly, these needs must be met by a continuum of services, on all levels. Systemic barriers to settlement, in the form of institutional policies and regulations, must be addressed in order to create equitable opportunities.

These issues are of obvious importance to the social work profession, and also have implications for education. As stated by Hick (2006), “a new set of issues confront social workers and others working in the social services. Social work practitioners are now required to have a greater sensitivity to religious beliefs and cultural background, and they will not only need to deal with the effects of discrimination and racism, but also find ways actively to combat it” (p. 232). There is also a need for future research on the role of social workers in learning how to assess newcomers’ situations, advocate for their human rights, and determine how to best utilize and deliver community resources and social services to them.

In addition, it is imperative that social workers become increasingly involved in the debates surrounding immigration policies on a provincial and national level. This may be accomplished through organizations like Metropolis and immigrant-serving agencies, and its benefit would be to provide a critical and anti-oppressive critical voice that calls for a recognition of the issues of human rights and social justice that face newcomers to Canada.

References

- Canada. Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), Integration Branch. (2001). *Immigrant integration in Canada: Policy objectives, program delivery and challenges*. Draft for discussion.
- Fontana, J. (2003). *Settlement and integration: A sense of belonging. “Feeling at home.”* Report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. Ottawa: House of Commons.
- Hick, S. (2006). *Social work in Canada*. (2nd ed.). Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing.
- Kamloops Immigrant Services. (2009). Retrieved July 20, 2009, from <http://www.kcris.ca>
- National Working Group on Small Centres Strategy. (2007). *Attracting and retaining immigrants: A toolbox of ideas for smaller centres*. Victoria: Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria.
- Settles, B.H. (2001). Being at home in a global society: A model for families’ mobility and immigration decisions. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 32(4), 627–645.
- Sherrell, K., Hyndman, J., & F. Preniqi. (2005). Sharing the wealth, spreading the burden? The settlement of Kosovar refugees in smaller British Columbia cities. *Canadian Ethnic Studies / Études ethniques au Canada*, 37(3): 76–96.

Biographical notes

Julie Drolet (PhD) is an assistant professor in Social Work at Thompson Rivers University, and Domain Leader of the Welcoming and Inclusive Communities at Metropolis BC.

Jeannette Robertson (EdD) is an assistant professor in Social Work at Thompson Rivers University, and senior researcher at Metropolis BC.

Wendy Robinson (BSW) is an employment and career counsellor at Kamloops Immigrant Services in British Columbia.

Social Work and Migration: Immigrant and Refugee Settlement and Integration

By Kathleen Valtonen. Surrey: Ashgate, 2008, xiv + 218 pages

Reviewed by Colleen Lundy*

Social work has a long history of responding to the needs of newcomers by engaging in settlement practice. In this well-researched and useful book, Kathleen Valtonen offers a comprehensive response to the challenges of immigrant and refugee settlement. In doing so, she considers social work as “a singular vehicle for carrying out critical human service interventions for the well-being and welfare of this client constituency of ‘newcomers’ or ‘newer citizens’” (p. 15). This is an important message for the profession since settlement practice is not given sufficient prominence in the social work curriculum and fewer social workers consider employment in the area.

Valtonen writes with authority. She has conducted a series of studies on refugee and immigrant integration in both Finland and Canada. In addition, she has taught social work in both Barbados and Trinidad. She is well-informed regarding research and developments in the receiving countries, particularly, Canada, Finland, and other European Union countries.

The author draws on an impressive body of literature as she examines the structural and social, historical, and political context of migration and demonstrates how “the movement of refugees and asylum seekers reflect the patterns of international and civil political upheaval and conflict across the globe” (p. 22). Attending to both the structural context and the individual experiences and difficulties is the strength of the text.

The book is divided into nine chapters and covers all facets of migration, including the context of global economics and political events, the experiences of those migrating, and the practice response and role of social workers in settlement.

Chapter 1 outlines the structure and dynamic of migration flows and the wider national and global events; it also outlines two models. Covered here are the role of state-sponsored repression and persecution and the possibilities and opportunities in the receiving country (push-pull model). The second model of migration—the social, economic, demographic, and political factors—distinguishes among fundamental forces, facilitating factors, and channelling factors, and describes each of these categories. Here it would be useful if the author offered a critique and indicated her preference for a model.

In Chapter 2, the author moves to summarizing human rights and citizen rights approaches to settlement practice. Here “critical” social work perspectives are presented. Chapter 3 presents an immigrant’s

engagements with three institutional systems of society—the state, the market, and civil society. The author distinguishes between the social democratic, corporatist, and liberal models of social welfare capitalist states. Chapter 4 contains the theoretical and conceptual frames related to settlement, referred to by the author as “evolving constructs.” The author defines models of structural integration and assimilation, and policy models of multiculturalism. The politic of inclusion and exclusion and the concepts of social justice, equality, and equity are discussed. In Chapter 5, Valtonen turns to the politics of inclusion and exclusion. She places emphasis on the concepts of equity, equality, and social justice as necessary principles for achieving full membership in society. Chapter 6 moves into the skills for settlement practice with refugees and immigrants and draws on “strengths, resilience and ecological approaches.” Chapter 7 adds the functions of the family in settlement, the institution that bears the impact. Then in Chapters 8 and 9, the focus is on intergenerational differences, different national integration policies, and social/settlement services. The book ends with Chapter 10 and provides a summary of ethical principles and settlement practice.

There are some common themes running through the chapters and at times repetition of concepts. In her thorough coverage, the author refers to and summarizes numerous sources. As is always the danger in such an approach, the author often relies on the conclusions of secondary sources. For example, in the discussion on critical social work, she includes radical social work and makes some generalizations without going to the original authors. Her statement that radical social work disregarded a person’s personal histories in favour of a class analysis would have been more convincing if she referred to the work of a specific author. In doing so, she could then put forward her own analysis and position.

Criticisms aside, the author demonstrates a thorough understanding of settlement concerns and the challenges facing social work in order to meet them. Both practitioners and students will benefit from this outstanding book.

This book review was originally published in INSCAN (International Settlement Canada), vol. 23, no. 1 (Summer 2009), pp. 21-22. It is reproduced here with the kind permission of the publisher, Centre for International Migration and Settlement Studies (formerly Research Resource Division for Refugees).

* Colleen Lundy is a professor at the School of Social Work, Carleton University, Ottawa, colleen_lundy@carleton.ca.