

Title BUILDING SOCIAL CAPITAL: LIVED EXPERIENCES OF SKILLED IMMIGRANT WOMEN AND MEN FROM SOUTH ASIA

Their narratives, their stories
tell the whole story!

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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
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Project funded by Metropolis BC

Context

• South Asian are almost 10% of the visible minority groups living in Metro Vancouver

• South Asia may include India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh

• After landing in Canada, immigrants (along with their families) go through tiring, frustrating and demanding settlement and integration process (Agnew 1996; Chandrasekhar 1985; Thobani 2007; Zaman 2006 & 2007).

• In order to successfully integrate and enjoy equal social and economic rights in the new country, it is pertinent for the immigrants to be socio-economically included in the mainstream society, of course by keeping their ethnic identities intact.

Social Resource Theory

• The concept of Social Capital was first used by L.J. Hanifan in 1916. The concept describes that social interaction and cooperation among people living in a community can lead to create social capital which can improve the quality of overall communal life.

• Nadia Caldi (2005) in her paper concludes that the new immigrants have greater risk of not having access to information after they land in Canada.

• Immigrants' lack of knowledge about the 'Canadian information environment' as well as their lack of social networks are two major reasons to make them vulnerable and socially excluded from the mainstream society.

Research Questions & Methodology

This study investigated:
(i) What sources of information/social networks are used by SA immigrants for their settlement and integration in Canada;
(ii) Whether SA immigrants benefit from non-government organizations providing immigrant services and programs in Metro Vancouver? Why or why not?
(iii) how available sources of support/information impact the process of settlement and integration of SA immigrants.

• Semi-structured in-depth interview guide was developed, however participants were given freedom to elaborate their experiences, sources of information and their usefulness.
• Data was collected from 26 participants (female/male skilled immigrants). Using snowball techniques, immigrants from various south Asian countries such as India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh were interviewed for the study.
• Approval from the Simon Fraser University Office of Ethical Review has been obtained. All the names of people and organizations are fictitious for privacy protection purposes.

Findings

Information Problem

WHAT DO IMMIGRANTS LOOK FOR BEFORE COMING TO CANADA?

"For Canadian life style, I didn't care much at time... I had an impression in my mind that I will go to Canada and everything will be settled and work out for me, I didn't have to worry about anything. I had access to internet so I kept browsing their immigration site, other than that I never bothered to search any other website because I was not interested." Ali Jaffery

"Yes, I did meticulously research about this country for job search and other procedures which I was to go through after coming here... Friends also were an important source but I did a lot of study on internet about the country about PR card, driving licence, medical system etc." Anil Mandis

DIS/CONNECTION BETWEEN REAL AND AVAILABLE INFORMATION ABOUT LIFE IN CANADA!

"Media and friends are the main sources of information but in my opinion both portrayed a rosy picture of this country. Media marketed this country showing nice picture of downtown and beautiful places of tourist only. The real information was never completely available before coming here and experiencing myself. So I always give realistic information about life in Canada, I don't want my settled friends in India to ruin their settlement and status in India and come here to live this life." Mukhtar Singh

"The information I got through my friends was the most realistic. I think some of the information in media was not very helpful and there was a disconnect between reality and the information." Sarath Prera

Findings

Family & Friends

FRIENDS: GREAT HELP FROM HOUSING TO JOB TO SOCIAL SUPPORT

"We stayed at our friend house for 4 days then we moved to our apartment, he selected this apartment for us." Muwarra

"He [her boss] hired me as a secretary, he was a friend of my husband and we have family terms." Sadaf Khan
"Absolutely. They had a very important role as most of them went through the same conditions." Anil Mandis

ANOTHER SIDE OF FRIENDS' ADVICE

"Your friends give you suggestions according to their situation without knowing their rights and opportunities for example if someone is working in 7/11 will suggest you to work there... everyone ask you to do join the profession or job they are doing." Asad Khan

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Findings

NOSTALGIA AND DISAPPOINTMENTS!

"I would like to say that anyone [immigration applicant] who has enough food/income [Roti] in their home[land], they should think several times before losing that. If you are comfortable at home[land], if you are healthy, sitting together with your family don't put yourself in trouble [by coming to Canada]." Mukhtar Singh

"I am just waiting the day I will get a chance, I will go back as soon as my kids are grown up and independent and will complete their education then I will go back. I feel that I am in a jail. Every second I remember India, every second." Amar Singh

"Sometime we are happy but most of the times we are home sick. Home sickness is something that is hard. The system is such that we cannot have our relatives here with us, it take years to sponsor your parents." Prem Chopra

Conclusion

RECOMMENDATIONS

- A mentoring program, along with paid internships may be helpful for new immigrants in a variety of ways.
- Recognition of immigrants' credentials is critical - A Canada-wide system must be in place.
- A comprehensive training/ manual for employers, in their respective areas, should be developed for them to be able to evaluate and analyze foreign education and skills in order to benefit from them.
- Employment quota for new immigrants, at least as trainees to start with.
- Settlement organizations need more resources—personnel and financial—to provide information about professional organizations to new immigrants. A detailed feedback system is required to evaluate their performance.

Findings

Career

JOB IS SETTLEMENT!

"But I never even got a job of dishwasher in any hotel." Anas Rashid

REFERENCE WORKS!

"My husband got job through connection.... In Canada contacts or references work." Sofia Zain

DO THEY KNOW MY SKILL!

"It might be that they have an issue of identifying the skill what an immigrant has." Anil Mandis

RELIABLE ADVICE: ROLE OF A MENTOR

"They should give internship along with mentoring." Sarath Prera

Findings

Social Networks

Social networks matter a lot and immigrants consistently look for developing social networks, these networks do help sooner or later.

"After the initial settlement, my first concern was to look for job opportunities and try to connect with the people so they can help me to find the job. So that was my primary focus... I got leads for jobs from my friends, who belonged to my community." Sarath Prera

"My neighbors, my friends also tried to connect me with some people who are working like in stores, as a cashier so I just tried to search a job for myself so after one month I got a job." Harbajan Kaur

"He is our landlord we are now friends; he referred my husband to his friend and his friend helped my husband in finding job." Sandhya Sharma

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GENDERED ANALYSIS

WOMEN VS. MEN: DYNAMICS OF SOCIAL LIFE

"Actually I didn't know much but my husband took information from his friends. His friends were here, one friend was studying here, and he took most information from him. Actually I didn't have any friend here. Now I have made a few friends in my daughter's school, other parents. We are good friends now and I get emotional and otherwise support as well, like social support." Harmandeep
"We only have one Pakistani friend and she is also elder so we don't have friends, one friend we had but not we don't have contact with them... I don't have any social life."

This shows double-tiered dependency for women immigrants; they were depended on their husbands to get them information from their [husbands] friends, until these women could make their own social circle. This makes acquiring information for settlement more difficult, lengthy and cumbersome process.

Conclusion

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Ethnic, cultural and religious associations could be involved to offer systematic information and support program for new comers.
- Service Canada is the first stop of immigrants - to get their SIN - they should be given detailed orientation, referrals, case management at that point. Governments have to be proactive to do this.
- Tele service is still recognized. Prompt telephone service may enhance the services, provide human touch, and facilitate the settlement process.

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SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

"We just went to temple to build some contacts, have some social life; temples are more like social clubs here rather a place for worship that's what I feel." Hamantini future." Sarath Prera

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ETHNIC AND CULTURAL ASSOCIATIONS

"They were not having enough resources to give organized help...but by going to their events, you made some references which can be helpful in future." Sarath Prera

Findings

SYSTEMIC BARRIERS

"But I think anybody would be ineffective in Canada when it comes to getting a good job in Canada and there are so many factors and deep-rooted reasons due to which we cannot point out only one thing." Ali Jaffery

"There are multi-fold issues. One is that despite tall claims from the government, racism could not be completely eliminated especially against South Asian people. It is hidden somewhere in small quantity but it is still there... still there are few people who think that immigrant people should not be equal to us, they should be kept on menial jobs. Secondly there is lack of resources, people don't get information even if some provinces want to employ them - there is no channelized direction available... For once they go to university, nobody entertains them there, there is no language barrier but accent is a bigger barrier, most of the time there few words are not understandable. They write very good English but looking at their color and their attire e.g. turban, people don't take them seriously." Jabbarjang Singh

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GENDERIZED EXPERIENCES: 'I WANT TO LOOK AFTER MY CHILDREN FIRST

"When I came here my daughter was 10 months old and I never thought that I will leave my kids with the babysitter so I stayed home." Harmandeep
"I opened up my day-care, it was going good but then my husband got job in Saudi Arabia and I had to hand it over to someone else... I think, it could have been more successful but my home responsibilities, like dropping off and picking up my children from school, other home chores." Sofia

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"Actually after spending two months program, still you are at point zero...the settlement agencies need little improvement in their work. They are working on old models 15-20 years old model. Life is so fast track here you cannot afford to remain jobless for a single day, there should be an arrangement to find job on fast track. I think the needs of immigrants have changed now." Ali Khan

"We went to [ABC] center and we were really shocked when the counselor over there even didn't know about the spelling of metrology. So an advisor who doesn't know the spellings of metrology [and about the profession] how will s/he help us?" Amar Singh
Women's experience
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"... they helped us regarding my kid medical bill and, I don't know about child subsidy so they helped me. They helped us in filling for child subsidy. I went to them for the get the care card mistake corrected which we made earlier in the form. I also went there for day care and English program." Munawarra

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