

# The Role of Social Networks in the Migration Decision of Immigrant Live-in Caregivers in Ontario, Canada

Jelena Atanackovic<sup>1</sup> & Ivy Lynn Bourgeault<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>School of Nursing, Faculty of Health, York University

<sup>2</sup>Telfer School of Management, University of Ottawa

## Background:

As a result of global restructuring and population aging, Canada faces a labour shortage in the provision of healthcare and childcare services. As one way to solve such shortages, Live-in Caregiver Program (LCP), a federal work visa program that is designed specifically to allow Canadian families to sponsor and employ non-Canadians as live-in caregivers for children and elderly, was created. In 2012, 6,242 foreign workers entered Canada under the LCP (CIC, 2012). Despite the important role that immigrant live-in caregivers play in the care of children and elderly in Canada, previous research did not sufficiently explore the role of social networks in their migration decision. This is surprising given that it has been shown that social networks are an influential factor in initiating migration flows (Findley, 1987; Knight, 2002; Simmons, 1989).

## Purpose:

The purpose of the research presented in this poster is to address such a gap, by exploring the role of informal (i.e.- family and friends) and formal networks (i.e.- recruitment agencies, schools for live-in caregivers) in the process of live-in caregivers' migration decision making. The research findings presented in this poster are part of the dissertation research of Dr. Jelena Atanackovic. In addition to the issue of migration experiences, her dissertation explored the working, living and integration experiences of LCP workers in Ontario, Canada.

## Methodological Approach:

A feminist qualitative approach to data collection has been adopted. The research draws on 34 semi-structured, face to face or telephone interviews with current and former live-in caregivers in the province of Ontario.

- The interview questions related to migration experiences focused on the reasons for which they decided to migrate to Canada and more specifically, on the role of various informal (family, friends) and formal (recruitment agencies, schools for live-in caregivers) networks in their migration decision.

The interviews were conducted in English, in the setting chosen by participants. Each taped interview was transcribed verbatim with participants' approval. Subsequently, interview transcripts were transferred into the NUD\*IST 6, a qualitative data analysis software program for coding. The data gathered through semi-structured interviews were analyzed using the techniques of thematic and constant comparative analysis.

## Acknowledgements

Funding for this research came from the Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Doctoral Fellowship and the McMaster's Harry Lyman Hooker Senior (Doctoral) Fellowship awarded to Jelena Atanackovic. These funds were supplemented by Jelena's supervisor, Dr. Ivy Bourgeault, from her funds at University of Ottawa.



Source: Pacific Rim Magazine. Retrieved from <http://langaraprm.com>

## Key Findings:

The findings from the interviews reveal that regardless of initial trigger for migration, social networks (both formal and informal) play a great role in the process of migration decision making of immigrant live-in caregivers. In particular, interviews with live-in caregivers reveal that:

- Most of them had someone (relative(s) or friend(s) or both to whom they were strongly tied) who was/were already in Canada when they were thinking about migration. In many cases these were very close relatives (parents, siblings) and very close friends from their home countries. For some, these were people they met when working as domestic helpers in other countries. As most of these people abroad were former and current live-in caregivers, prospective live-in caregivers could hear about their experiences with this immigration.
  - Some even got contacted by relatives with direct job offers. For instance, a Polish live-in caregiver got contacted by her not so close relatives with the proposition to care for their children.

- Recruitment agencies are very important source of information about the LCP for prospective live-in caregivers who do not know anybody already living in Canada and/or working under this immigration program. Recruitment agencies serve as an additional source of information about the program also for some live-in caregivers who first learned about the program from personal connections.

- Some Filipino respondents reveal that they got information about the program from the schools on live-in caregivers which they attended before or upon coming to Canada.

The interviews also show that in addition to social networks, gender, race/ethnicity and age come to shape the process of live-in caregivers' migration decision making. More specifically, the interviews reveal that:

- As live-in jobs in Canada are predominantly female occupations (in particular, approximately 95 percent of live-in caregivers in Canada are females), having a tie to women already residing in Canada predisposes these women to migrate as domestic workers.

- Attitudes towards female migration are often contextual, varying from one country to another.

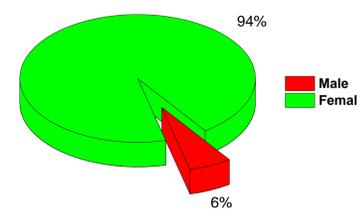
- While Filipina domestic workers state that their migration to Canada is strongly encouraged by their society and families, this is not the case with female live-in caregivers of other ethnicities in the sample. For instance, one Chinese female respondent explains that family members opposed her decision to migrate.

- Due to age discrimination in some Asian countries which precludes women who are over 50 years old from getting employed, some considered Canada a better option to migrate to as domestic workers.

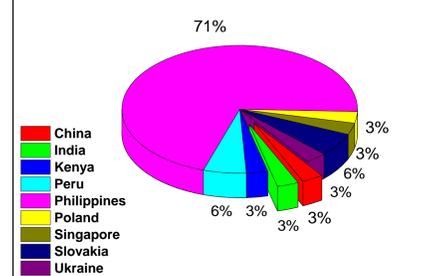
## Limitations and Directions for Future Research:

- This study did not explicitly focus on societal attitudes towards live-in caregiver occupation. As in some of the interviews this issue emerged as a significant factor in the migration decision, it should be explored more fully by the future research.
- Majority of the sample are Filipinos (in particular, 24 of the participants) and female (in particular, 32 participants). Future studies could benefit from recruiting more male and non-Filipino participants.

The Breakdown of the Sample According to the Respondents' Gender



The Breakdown of the Sample According to the Respondents' Country of Origin



The Breakdown of the Sample According to the Respondents' Age

