



Promoting Food Literacy for Health and Well-Being of the Immigrants in Canada

PATHWAYS TO PROSPERITY (P2P) 2016 NATIONAL CONFERENCE

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Introduction



- 20.6% of the total population in Canada are immigrants, with one out of 5 people being a foreign-born (Statistics Canada, 2011)
 - Highest proportion among the G8 countries
 - Reflective of Canada's emphasis on multiculturalism and ethnic diversity
- **Why should we care about immigrant health?**
 - Newcomers' health and well-being is important for Canada's future, as [international migration is identified as a critical strategy for Canada's economic development](#)
 - Immigration is the [most important source of the country's population growth](#)
 - With significant proportion of Canada's population being immigrants, this makes it particularly important for us to focus on immigrant health – as it is directly related to various issues such as [the cost and adequacy of the Canadian healthcare system](#)
 - Furthermore, good health and well-being is one of the [key indicators of successful immigrant integration](#)

Immigrant Health in Canada?



- It has been widely-documented that there exists a **healthy immigrant effect**, which refers to the pattern that immigrants enter the host country healthier than the native-born population (McDonald and Kennedy, 2004)
 - According to research, this is **partly due to the selection effect** of immigrants – with immigration policies requiring medical screening to qualify for immigration (Lesser et al., 2014)
- **Immigrant Health Paradox:** has been well-documented in the Canadian literature and around the world (Sanou et al., 2014 Martinez, 2013)
 - **the reality is that immigrants become less healthy over time as they acculturate** (Antecol and Bedard, 2006)
 - As discussed earlier, the relative health advantage that immigrants have over their native counterparts upon arrival in the host country – diminishes over time (Martinez, 2013)
 - As immigrants resided longer in Canada, their risk for various types of chronic diseases eventually converged and even surpassed that of native born population (Lesser et al., 2014)



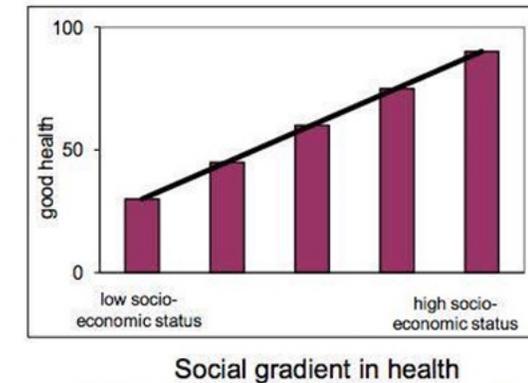
Immigrant Acculturation

- **Immigrant Acculturation:**
 - Gordon argued that acculturation is inevitable upon migration (Alba and Nee, 1997)
 - **Acculturation** refers to the process of which the immigrants adopt the cultural patterns of the host society
- It has been well-documented that **immigrant's quality of life improves with acculturation** (Clark and King, 2008)
 - Immigrant acculturation is associated with:
 - ↑ in income, education, and language proficiency (↑ in the likelihood of upward mobility)
 - greater access to the health care system; and
 - less likely to be residentially segregated
- However, there is an exception to these positive outcomes of acculturation among immigrants
 - As discussed previously – with acculturation, **immigrant's health gradually declines over time** and become more vulnerable to various types of chronic diseases



The SES-health gradient

- Refers to the relationship between **socio-economic status (SES)** and individual health
- **The health benefit of higher SES is well-documented:**
 - having higher socioeconomic status (e.g. having higher earnings and education) is associated with reduced health risks and chronic diseases (Pampel et al., 2012)
 - As those with higher SES have greater access to resources and knowledge about health maintenance
- **However, this SES-health gradient does not hold for immigrants**
 - Immigrant's SES increase with acculturation, but their health declines with acculturation which questions us





Health Literacy among Immigrants

- We need a growing focus on improving the *health literacy* among immigrant population
 - The term **health literacy** describes the ability to obtain, understand and use health information
- Keeping up with the latest health information and what they mean in our daily lives is challenging for everyone
 - **but more so for newcomers with limited English and little experience in Canada**
- **Enhancing health literacy applies not only to medical setting – but also to a variety of everyday settings such as in making everyday food choices**
 - Immigrants face many challenges in making healthy food choices in Canada, as they often find themselves in a new food environment
 - Immigrant's unfamiliarity with grocery stores, lack of awareness of Canadian nutrition discourse and lack of learned cooking skills present challenges for them
- However, very little research has been conducted on **food literacy**

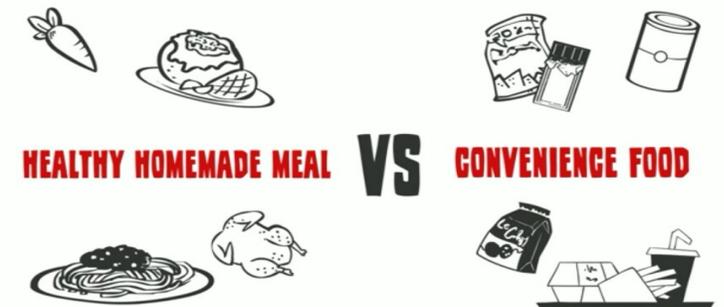
The Importance of Food Literacy

- Key Issue: **Insufficient food literacy** among the immigrants (e.g. immigrants consuming more processed and instant food) → one of the key contributors to their **health decline**
 - This is an **underestimated problem**
- There has been a lack of research conducted to explain **WHY** immigrants adopt to unhealthy dietary pattern as they acculturate in the host country



Immigrants' Challenge in Acquiring Food Literacy

- **Food literacy**: the ability of an individual **to understand food** in a way that they develop a positive relationship with it, including food skills and practices across the lifespan **in order to navigate, engage, and participate** within a complex food system
 - *It is the ability to make decisions to support the achievement of personal health and a sustainable food system considering environmental, social, economic, cultural, and political components (Cullen et al. 2015)*
- **Lack of adequate levels of food literacy among immigrants**
 - Often due to various linguistic and cultural barriers
 - **For example:**
 - immigrant's unfamiliarity with grocery stores,
 - lack of awareness of Canadian nutrition discourse, and
 - lack of learned cooking skills (Westernized cooking skills)



Results from a Pilot Study: Qualitative Interviews with Recent Immigrants

- Qualitative Methodology was conducted with recent immigrants (who immigrated within last 3 years)
 - Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews (N=5)
- To explore various challenges which immigrants experience in acquiring food literacy
- **The results of this pilot study revealed that:**
- Recent immigrants are typically most familiar with foods from their place of origin, but often **are not as familiar with the Canadian nutritional discourse and Westernized cooking skills:**
 - Immigrants' prior food literacy are often not directly applicable when they immigrate, as some of the ingredients they used for cooking their healthy ethnic meals was not available in the host country
- Immigrants also **struggled in navigating resources** for making healthy food choices
 - cookbooks often did not help, due to language barriers
 - resources provided by immigrant settlement agencies were often targeting in providing help with employment

Proposed Research Project:

- To examine the role of the social structure in creating ethnic disparities in acquiring food literacy
 - Whether community organizations, settlement programs, and integration policies influence immigrants' ability to navigate resources for acquiring food literacy
- **Two Parts: Mixed-Method (Both Quantitative and Qualitative Methodology)**
- **1) Quantitative Data Analysis: *Canadian Community Health Survey, 2015***
 - Comparing the level of food literacy between immigrants living in **Urban Cities vs. Rural Areas**
 - Will specifically examine how different settlement and integration policies will have a different impact on immigrant's level of food literacy
 - Data release postponed to March 2017
- **2) Qualitative Data Collection:** Discussed in the next slide

Qualitative Methodology: In-Depth Interviews

- Interviews collected from 3 different groups, with representatives from:
 - 1) community health organizations
 - 2) immigration-related groups
 - e.g. settlement agencies, government officials working in immigration-related area, etc
 - 3) immigrants (who immigrated within last 10 years)
- The goal is to explore and identify the challenges in promoting food literacy among the immigrant population; and to use the results for evidence-based policymaking and program development
 - Target sample size is 15 per each group (Total=45)
 - Will start interviewing once the ethics protocol is approved

If you are interested in being updated about the progress of this project, please contact:

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Health Awareness Canada

- **Health Awareness Canada (HAC)** is a registered nonprofit organization with a mission of helping newcomers (e.g. immigrants and refugees) to maintain their health and well-being in Canada – by raising awareness of the importance of food literacy.
- **Organizational Goals are:**
 - to raise an awareness of how food literacy may affect immigrants' health and well-being
 - to create a health information hub for everyone – to collaboratively work together in helping the newcomers
 - As a bridge organization to bring together the settlement agencies, community organizations, government ministries, social and health services, and educational institutions
- **Poster Presentation: 6-7:30pm** (3C Project: Connect and Change the Community Project)
- **Please visit our website:** <https://healthawarenesscanada.org/>