



Navigating Life Changes: Immigrant Women's Post-Pandemic Experiences

Bidushy Sadika, PhD Candidate; Victoria Esses, PhD

Migration & Ethnic Relations, Social Psychology, Western University

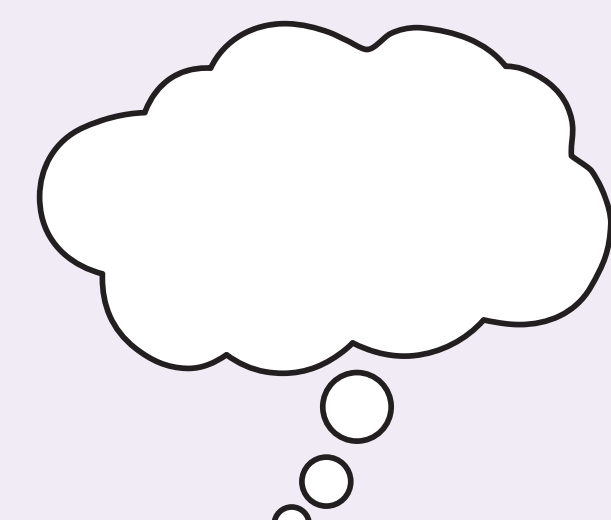
BACKGROUND

- During the COVID-19 pandemic, immigrant women in Canada experienced marginalization exacerbated by long-term structural inequalities.
- They faced economic, institutional, interpersonal, and individual challenges, including overrepresentation in care and frontline sectors, limited access to affordable housing and services, heightened gender-based violence, and adverse mental health.
- Research on the post-pandemic experiences of immigrant women is limited; however, existing studies indicate that women continue to face barriers to re-entering the job market, along with persistent health and economic challenges affecting Canadians overall.

CURRENT RESEARCH

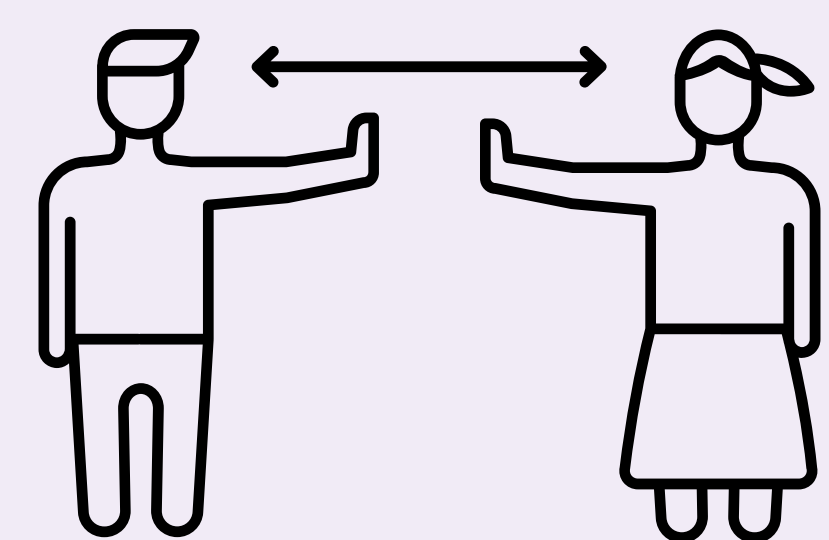
- This study investigates how immigrant women from intersectional backgrounds in Canada experience and cope with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Local Immigration Partnerships and immigrant-serving agencies from Ontario, Prince Edward Island, Alberta, Nova Scotia, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan collaborated in participant recruitment.
- 20 first-generation immigrant women in Canada were interviewed, with an average age of approximately 39 years. On average, they have lived in Canada for about 8 years.
- The majority hold permanent residency status (60%), reside in Ontario (70%), are married (60%), and do not have children (50%). Also, 35% have a university graduate degree, and 30% are employed full-time. They represent a range of ethnicities, with the largest groups being Middle Eastern (30%) and South Asian (20%).

FINDINGS



Reflecting on Life Changes, Adapting to New Realities and Experiencing Personal Growth

“COVID has taught us good lessons, also how to be independent and self-sufficient. And if one thing does not work, like how meeting in person does not work, we have to do meeting virtually. All that COVID has taught. ... Natural disaster happens. It not only brings bad things open, it also teaches us good lessons. So everything happened for good. That's what I think, and I attribute with good thoughts. So things are moving very well. Now we are independent. That's what I say. We are independent, not dependent on anyone. We are only at the mercy of God.”



Experiencing Deteriorating Social Skills and Rebuilding Community Connections

“I was a very kind of—and this is kind of a cultural thing—very touchy and close person. I'm not anymore. I hate handshakes. I cannot handshake anymore. When a person gives me a handshake, I give a handshake for being polite, but since COVID, I don't want to give handshakes. And I don't want to hug people so much. I used to kind of go everywhere and give hugs to everyone. I don't touch, I became so self aware about bacteria and like—having sanitizer in the car, I was never this kind of person. But I became one, you know, and I hate it, but it's the reality.”



Navigating Family Strengths, Motherhood Challenges, and Evolving Interpersonal Relationships

“I think that's the thing as a mom when my kids are not okay, I am not okay. I know that's something that women do, they put other people in front of them, but I'm aware of that. I think for parents their kids well-being is more important than their personal well-being. That's how I feel, and I feel that's probably that way for a lot of parents. So whatever happens to my kids, it actually happens to me and it's my problem. That's why I keep bringing it up.”



Experiencing Shifts in Work Structure and the Post-Pandemic Impact on the Economy

“Employment, cost of living, especially the rent, it affected a lot on us and the main problem is employment. If you have good employment you wouldn't think about rent and cost of living right, so Covid affected a lot on this ... it will take time for me [to recover] ... until I get out of this depression, or this anxiety of not having a job and maybe take time or I will replace it by studying or starting as soon as I get a job, so I will start and I will get busy.”

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the research assistants, Carolyn, Christina, Gwyneth, Idunnuayo, Kieran, Piraduza, for their invaluable support with interview transcription. A heartfelt thank you also goes to the partner organizations and Local Immigration Partnerships (LIPs) for their assistance in participant recruitment.

RECOMMENDATIONS



Host Activities to Promote Community-Building

“There's lots of things besides therapy that can help our mental health, I feel ... there are experts out there who know more about it than I do. I know being outside is good, I know being with people is good, so how can we just embrace each other a bit more that way?”



Enhance Specialized Information Provision for Immigrants

“It's information. ... at least in English, even this information like step by step - if this happens, you should do this. ... Yes, this information exists, but it is generic for the whole [of] Canada or for the whole province. But ... every province is different, and from city to city, it's different, and from neighborhood to neighbourhood. I have no idea where the closest walk-in clinic is. I have no idea where is the closest emergency. I don't know where to go.”



Provide Intersectionally Adapted Mental Health Support

“Mental health support needs to be ... adapted to the woman ... and culturally adapted to immigrants ... they need to take into consideration the background of the immigrant woman, being a woman, of course, but then, the background of these women and the experience when they talk to them, and sometimes even languages for people who are not fluent.”