

Recent Research on Newcomer Youth

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Introduction

To begin, I would like to thank my colleagues Sharon, Bob, Lawrence, Michelle and Awad for their presentations. Many of the issues, concerns and examples that they have presented and shared with us today compliment and further support the research findings that I will be sharing with you today. I will be talking to you about some of the recently funded research on newcomer youth in Ontario.

Background Information on CIC, OASIS

I am not sure how many of you are familiar with the settlement and integration programs that are administered by CIC, through OASIS to assist newcomers when they first arrive in Ontario. For those of you that already know a bit about these programs, please bear with me as I provide an overview of them.

The Ontario Administration of Settlement and Integration Services (OASIS), is a part of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) that administers and funds settlement programs and services for newcomers in the Ontario Region. The three programs that I will highlight today are the Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program (ISAP), HOST, and Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC). I suspect that many of you will be familiar with the latter language related settlement program.

ISAP

The ISAP program funds organizations to provide immigrants with essential bridging services to facilitate access to community services and resources. These services include reception, orientation, translation and interpretation, referral to community resources and mainstream services, para-professional counseling, general information and employment-related services, and other activities to improve settlement prospects.

ISAP also funds projects that are designed to enhance or improve the delivery of settlement services. These projects might include research projects like the ones I will be talking about later in this presentation, seminars and conferences to share information about settlement and integration activities, training of ISAP workers, and audio/visual materials.

HOST

The HOST program provides funds to organizations for the recruitment, training, matching and co-ordination of volunteers to help newcomers adapt, settle and integrate into Canadian life. This program helps newcomers overcome the stress of moving to a new country by having a volunteer help them to learn about available services and how to use them, practice English or French, make contacts in their employment field and participate more fully in community activities. Volunteers receive many benefits from this program, as well, including meeting new friends, learning about other cultures and strengthening community life.

LINC

The Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) program provides basic language training in one of Canada's official languages to adult immigrants as soon as possible after their arrival in Canada so that they may acquire the necessary language skills to integrate into Canadian society. This is the program that many of you are probably most familiar with. LINC training can be taken full or part-time, in the workplace or in a community-based setting, and can include alternative training methods such as home study. Where necessary, transportation and childminding assistance may be available to LINC students for whom language training would be otherwise inaccessible.

In addition, to the basic language training, there is a linguistic eligibility determination component to LINC where the Canadian Language Benchmarks are used to determine client eligibility and the assessment of the current language skills of adult immigrants. As many of you may already be aware, the assessment process allows the language needs of immigrants to be matched with appropriate language training options.

There is also a delivery assistance component that is used to obtain expertise or specialized help to assist in the delivery of LINC activities for the direct benefit of our clients. This component might include activities such as the analysis of the language needs of particular client groups, research, development of audio/visual materials or related products; and professional development training.

Overview of Presentation

I would like to begin by giving you an overview of my presentation. To set the context, I will provide you with the rationale for why this research was funded. I will then share with you some descriptive elements of the research projects, their findings, and recommendations that are specific to education and that may be useful for the work that you do. Lastly, I will talk a bit about how CIC/OASIS plans to use the research in future settlement initiatives.

Why fund research on newcomer youth?

There are many reasons why CIC/OASIS decided to research the settlement and integration needs of newcomer youth.

Province Wide Consultations

During the summer of 1998, CIC/OASIS held province wide consultations with newcomers, community agencies and other interested stakeholders. The goal was to identify settlement needs and priorities. The findings identified three key areas of greatest need including the need to serve the diverse needs of family members, with an emphasis on youth.

Response to One-Time Call for Proposals

Following the consultations, a call for proposals was developed for One-Time projects that would develop innovative ways to respond to emerging newcomers' needs. The result was that several research proposals were submitted to CIC/OASIS that focused on research that would identify the settlement-related needs of newcomers 16-20 years of age. Many of these proposals highlighted the lack of research information that was available on the settlement and integration needs of newly arrived immigrant youth. Traditionally, research on new immigrants has focused on adult needs.

Lack of Research in this Area

CIC/OASIS' own review of existing research also indicated that there was very little researched information on the settlement and integration experiences of newcomer youth. There was a lot of anecdotal information from front line staff and agencies but no documented information that could be used to better understand the experiences of youth. The panels of experts that reviewed the various proposals received, identified a need for research in this area.

Useful Information for Settlement and Integration Programs

In addition to responding to the identified needs from the consultations, CIC/OASIS undertook the research because we wanted to gather data and information that might improve our current settlement programs and initiatives that relate directly to the needs of newcomer youth and their families.

Giving a Voice to Newcomer Youth

By asking newcomer youth for their opinions and experiences of settlement, the research provided an opportunity for these young people to speak directly about their settlement and integration experiences. Often the information that we receive is provided by parents, professionals and other adults.

Collaboration

Undertaking this youth research provided a unique opportunity to adopt a collaborative and co-ordinated approach to the research, analysis and dissemination of the findings. The collaboration brought together representatives from government, academia, community agencies, parents, and immigrant youth to speak about the settlement and integration experiences of youth. Some of the benefits of the collaborative approach included the ability of CIC/OASIS to fund a greater diversity of projects by reducing the duplication of information and work. Additionally, the collaboration provided an opportunity to bring together the various strengths of each of the groups while supporting each other in areas where weaknesses might have made the research challenging.

The group partners in the research collaboration included the Centre for Refugee Studies, the Joint Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Settlement, Centre for Research and Education in Human Services, the Coalition of Visible Minority Women Ontario Inc., Family Services Association of Toronto, the Council of Agencies Serving South Asians, the South Asian Women's Centre, Pinecrest-Queensway Health and Community Services and Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

Description of the Research

For the purposes of this presentation, I will be focusing on six of the research studies that directly relate to the settlement and integration experiences of immigrant youth. The following is a list of the research reports and a brief summary of each of their studies:

1. "Working for Youth Research Project Final Report" prepared by Pinecrest-Queensway Health and Community Services (PQCHS). The research looked at barriers to employment for newcomer youth in the Ottawa-Carleton Region and how these barriers affected their integration and adaptation.
2. "Factors Affecting the Settlement and Adaptation Process of Canadian Adolescent Newcomers 16-19 Years of Age", prepared by Family Services Association of Toronto (FSA). The study looked at the psychological factors that affect the settlement, adaptation and integration processes of newly arrived immigrant youth.
3. "Colour, Culture and Dual Consciousness: Issues identified by south Asian Immigrant Youth in the Greater Toronto Area", Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA) and the South Asian Women's Centre (SAWC). The project documented the cultural and racial differences that have an effect on the settlement and integration of South Asian youth and their families who settle in the greater Toronto area.
4. "Enhancing Services and Supports for Immigrant Youth in Waterloo Region Final Report", prepared by the Centre for Research and Education in Human Services (CREHS). The research used a participatory action research approach to examine the challenges faced by immigrant youth and their families in the Kitchener/ Waterloo area.
5. "The Needs of Newcomer Youth and Emerging Best Practices to Meet Those Needs Final Report", prepared by the Joint Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Settlement (CERIS). The needs and concerns of newcomer youth and the "emerging best practices" used by service providers to meet those needs were examined in this research.
6. "English Language and Communication: Issues for African and Caribbean Immigrant Youth in Toronto", prepared by the Coalition of Visible Minority Women Ontario, Inc. (CVMW). The research focused on issues around English language communication for African and Caribbean newcomer youth and how this impacts on their settlement and integration.

Methodologies

Qualitative and Quantitative Research

The research on newcomer youth employed both qualitative and quantitative methods of gathering data.

Advisory Committees

Most of the research projects had advisory committees that provided input and feedback into the various stages of the research. The advisory committees often included representatives from school boards, ESL teachers, immigrant youth and their parents, service providing organizations, community groups, other funders and levels of government.

Methods

All of the research reports contain literature reviews. Some of the literature reviews were specific to the research being undertaken and some of them were more general. For example, the literature review by the CVMW focuses on issues related to Caribbean and African youth, while the literature review completed by CERIS is more general.

Other methods of gathering data included the use of focus groups with youth, family and service providers; key informants; individual interviews with youth, families and service providers; surveys and psychological tests.

Target Populations

The research looked at the needs of immigrant youth between the ages of 16-24, and represented a diverse range of ethno-cultural groups and languages. Additionally, the number of groups and individuals that participated in the research across Ontario are impressive. More than 700 newcomer youth across Ontario participated in the six studies, 200 parents, and approximately 300 agencies. The latter group included agencies and organizations related to education, employment, mental health, settlement, social services and health.

Ethno-Cultural Groups

The ethno-cultural groups represented in the combined studies included youth from Russia, Somalia, Iran, Korea, Philippines, Portugal, Jamaica, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Barbados, Grenada, Trinidad and Tobago, Ghana, Zambia, Nigeria, Poland, Tanzania, Afghanistan, Romania, Sudan, Iraq, Nicaragua, Chile, China (mainland China and Hong Kong), Botswana, Bangladesh, Fiji, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Finland, Hungary and the Former Yugoslavia.

Languages Spoken

The languages spoken by the youth other than English and French included Arabic, Spanish, Farsi, Serbo-Croatian, Serbian, Portuguese, Edo, Twi, Fanti, Akan, Beni, Assyrian, Gujarati, Dari, German, Slovak, Romanian, Hungarian, Bravan, Polish, Hindi, Punjabi, Mandarin, Cantonese, Urdu, Tamil, Katchi and Sindhi.

Common Findings for Youth in General

Because many of you work with newcomer youth, have children, friends or neighbours who are youth, and were a youth at some point yourself, you will probably be able to relate to a lot of the issues identified by newcomer youth. Many of their issues are similar to those of other youth. However, these issues are often intensified because of their settlement and immigration experiences. The experiences are further differentiated by gender, age, country of origin, length of stay in Canada, ethnicity and other factors.

The following are some of the issues identified by the youth. I will not have an opportunity to go into any great detail for any of the points. However, I will try to give you a flavour of each of them by quoting from the youth themselves whenever possible. The quotes are taken from the various research reports.

Intergenerational Tensions and Conflicts

The newcomer youth identified issues and concerns around things like curfew, dating, clothing, and succeeding academically. For many of us, these issues are similar to those experienced by other youth. What is different for newcomer youth is that these issues are compounded by their immigration and settlement experience.

Lengthy Separations

This issue is probably not as common to most youth and can often create friction and tension in families. For example, it is not unusual for some newcomer youth, especially for Filipino and Jamaican newcomer youth, to have been separated for long periods of time from their mothers. The separation can sometimes contribute to feelings of resentment between the newcomer youth and their mothers. When the youth and their mothers are finally reunited in Canada, they often experience many difficulties adjusting to each other, their new roles and their expectations of one another.

Isolation and Loneliness

For many of the youth, immigration to Canada has been an isolating experience. They have left their friends and extended family behind. They often shared stories of having difficulty in finding friends and in "fitting in". One of the youth commented, "In my country, everyone wanted to be friends with the new student, but that is not true here". Another youth stated, "you have to dress a certain way and be like the people you want to fit in with".

Additionally, some of the youth identified Canadian culture as isolating. One youth was quoted as saying, "in my country our houses are more open so you can see and talk to people".

Policing

For some youth, there were concerns around policing. In many of the studies, Somali and Portuguese male youth, for example, identified being constantly harassed by police.

Poverty and Lack of Resources

For many newcomer youth, poverty and lack of resources also impact on their settlement and integration experiences. One youth stated " .parents want you to work and make money for the family and help out.it's hard because you can't be successful at school and then have a part-time job working 5, 6, 7 hours a night, plus coming home and doing your homework".

Bullying and Violence

Bullying and violence were also a concern for immigrant youth. The bullying and violence identified was not restricted to mainstream "Canadian" youth but included youth from other newcomer groups.

Racism, Sexism and Discrimination

Racism, sexism and discrimination were also identified as issues that newcomer youth experienced regularly. For example, Serbian youth described the discrimination they experienced during the recent Kosovo crisis. The portrayal of Serbs in the media impacted on how other youth treated them. One Serbian youth explained that a group of other youth teased and yelled the following at him during the bombing of Yugoslavia. "You Serbs kill people. We don't like to be friendly with you!", "Go home Serbs!" Youth from

other cultural groups shared similar stories. "We recall frequently hearing us Asians being referred to as "chinks" or "gooks".

Traumatic Pre-Migration Experiences

Traumatic pre-migration experiences, as mentioned earlier by Lawrence, also have an impact on newcomer youth and their experiences in settling and integrating into Canadian society. Many of the youth witnessed injuries to members of their families as a consequence of ethnic cleansing, combat and/or constant gunfire. The groups of youth that identified these types of experiences included youth from Somalia, Afghanistan and the former Yugoslavia.

Role Reversal

As mentioned by Lawrence, immigrant youth often experience situations in which their roles are reversed and/ or different from what they were in their previous country. Many of them have additional responsibilities. Some of them become translators for their parents, write bills and correspondence for their parents, do adult chores and care for younger siblings.

Discipline

Another issue that was often mentioned was the tensions that arose around discipline. For some immigrant youth physical punishment may have been accepted and used as a way of discipline in their previous country. However, many of the youth quickly learned that that physical punishment is not allowed in Canada. One youth stated, "When you do something bad back home, your parents can beat you. But when you come to Canada, when parents shout at them, they call the police. That's the Canadian way."

Common Findings for Newcomer Youth Specific to Education

The newcomer youth who participated in the research study identified several issues that are directly related to the educational system. These issues included the challenge of language, grade and level placements, racism, sexism and discrimination, school violence, lack of respect for teachers, expectations of teachers, discipline, religious tensions in schools and ESL programs. Additionally, the research strongly supported the school as one of the best locations to provide support to immigrant youth and families with their settlement and integration needs.

Language

Language was a source of tension, crisis and struggle for most immigrant youth. As mentioned earlier by Lawrence and Awad, in some cases, difficulty in acquiring the language impacted on other aspects of the youth's life including their education, employment, health and well-being. In some cases it contributes to a loss in self-esteem.

Jamaican youth, for example, found that language presented a challenge because they were routinely placed in ESL classes, despite the fact that English is their first language. "I already knew English, but it was like when I come here I could understand them but they could not understand me. They wanted to put me into an ESL program. Probably because I had an accent and I spoke fast."

Grade and Level of Placement

There was also a general frustration amongst some of the youth around the grade and level of placement they were put in within the school system. Many of the youth felt that they were often placed in lower levels and grades of course work than they were capable of handling. One South Asian youth commented, "they see a brown person who doesn't speak English well and think that all brown people can't speak. They'll stick them in ESL".

Violence in the Schools

For many newcomer youth school violence was a great concern. The Somali and Filipino youth for example expressed concern over bullying and extortion by other youth. Amongst the younger youth, fights were often initiated because they were teased about their inability to speak English or their accent.

Religious Tensions

In some instances, newcomer youth experienced religious tensions. For example, some Somali Muslim youth shared their experiences of trying to get prayer time approved in schools. Many teachers did not support their desire to pray during school time. Youth were sometimes not permitted a prayer room in the school and in some cases penalized by teachers for leaving class to pray. Additionally, different faith practices were often not understood by other youth, for example, fasting during Ramadan.

Lack of Respect for Teachers

Many of the newcomer youth were surprised at the lack of respect they witnessed in Canada for teachers. For example, Filipino, Jamaican and Korean newcomer youth reported that in their countries teachers are treated with great respect. Additionally, many of the youth indicated that they often felt intense pressure from their peers to talk back to teachers in order to gain respect and "fit in".

Perceptions and Expectations of Teachers and Counsellors

Although for many newcomer youth, teachers had a positive impact on them, some of the youth indicated that the teachers' perceptions and expectations of them often impacted on their self-esteem and how they performed academically. "They took my tests in math and English, my scores were well above average. The counsellor told me "you should go to community college and maybe handy-work would be good for you."

Discipline in the Schools

In terms of discipline, many of the youth were astonished at what they perceived as the lack of discipline in schools. "In my country if you disrespect the teacher, and the teacher calls your mother, your mother will tell the teacher to beat you. And after, when you get home, your mother will beat you too!" Another youth stated, "Kids here get punished by timeout or you're grounded. What kind of punishment is that?"

ESL Programs

Some newcomer youth were frustrated with ESL programs and in some cases resented them. This was especially true for youth that did not perceive that they had language difficulties. "In the West Indies we have some words in our dialect which is different from plain English. The Jamaican dialect that we have, the Canadians don't understand. It's not that we don't speak English."

Common Findings for Sources of Support for Newcomer Youth

The research provided an opportunity for many of the newcomer youth to identify some of the supports that they felt were useful for their settlement and integration into Canadian society. These supports included friends, extended families, ESL programs, religious institutions, settlement and other community agencies.

Same Ethnic Group Peer Networks

One of the supports that many youth identified that was helpful in their settlement process was a peer network from the same ethnic group. ". You're new in the country and you have no one, if you have someone who talks your language and then could translate stuff for you then it's much easier for you to communicate with other people. And you have some kind of support rather than being alone."

ESL Programs

While some immigrant youth found ESL programs to be frustrating, others identified them as a support. Similarly, while some immigrant youth identified their teachers as a hindrance to their integration, other immigrant youth found teachers, especially ESL teachers, to be very supportive. "I had a nice teacher. He was really nice- he doesn't look like he was going to come after you- he tells you everything word by word so we could understand". "ESL teachers are helpful - they understand. They don't laugh. They spend time with you. They don't embarrass you because you don't know the language."

Common Recommendations for Education

The youth had various recommendations for the educational system that they felt would make their settlement and integration experiences easier.

Mentoring Programs

Some of the immigrant youth indicated that it would be useful for them to have mentoring programs in schools where more established immigrant youth could be paired up with newcomers.

Accurate Assessments of Placements

The youth that were frustrated with what they perceived was an inaccurate assessment of their language ability and skills identified the need to have more accurate ways of assessing their knowledge and skill level. They felt that schools should develop aptitude tests that are less discriminating. "Just because I don't speak English well doesn't mean I'm stupid."

Promotion of Anti-Discrimination Policies

The newcomer youth identified a need for greater promotion of anti-discrimination and greater cultural sensitivity. They felt that cross-cultural training for all members of the school community was necessary.

Partnerships Between Community Organizations and Schools

Some of the newcomer youth felt that there should be more partnerships between community organizations and schools. Some youth felt that it was important to invite community educators and leaders from various ethno-cultural groups to present at the schools. This would allow other youth to better appreciate their culture and communities.

Links Between Parents and Schools

Newcomer youth also identified the need to have better links between parents and schools. This would allow their parents to better understand what is expected of them in the school system, especially if the expectations were different from their previous country. "I think parents need to understand what you are going through in school. You are going through different stuff from there, that they need to change their ways too, a little". Some youth suggested that their parents be encouraged to be on parent councils, as this would provide an opportunity for their parents to become familiar with the school and have input into policies.

Designated Prayer Areas

For some newcomer youth, it was important that they be able to practice their faith at school. If there were designated prayer areas, it would be less difficult for them to practice their faith and would reduce some of the stress that they experienced.

Multicultural Curriculum

Various newcomer youth found it difficult to understand the curriculum because it was very focused on North American content. One youth was quoted as saying, "And you know that people don't have any respect for people they don't learn about..". At the same time it was mentioned that teachers and other school staff needed to be careful of what kind of information they shared with students. For example, Muslim youth expressed their concerns that they were often represented as terrorists, violent and evil. This type of information made it difficult to fit in with other youth.

Homework Clubs and Co-op Opportunities

Some newcomer youth sighted the need for more opportunities for social interaction that also allowed them to gain help with their studies. Homework clubs enabled some youth to keep up with their schoolwork while meeting new friends. Additionally, for some youth it was difficult for their parents to help them with their homework assignments because they were not familiar with Canadian curriculum. The newcomer youth also identified the need for greater co-op opportunities where they could learn more about the Canadian work place and get job experience at the same time.

What is CIC/OASIS doing with the research?

Dissemination and Sharing of Information

CIC/OASIS is in the process of disseminating and sharing the research information regionally, nationally and internationally. For example, my presentation to you here today.

The research findings were just recently presented in Vancouver at the Fifth International Metropolis conference. The conference included representatives from across Canada and other countries around the world. These findings have also been shared with various communities across Ontario. Recently, the research was displayed in Ottawa, London and Toronto at the "Putting the Pieces Together" interactive exhibits, that were attended by representatives from various levels of government, community and settlement agencies, academics and other stakeholders interested in settlement and integration issues. The information has also been shared with our National Headquarters in Ottawa and with other funders.

The research conducted by CREHS in the Waterloo Region was presented to other funders. The result was that funds were approved by the United Way for a youth worker position that will address some of the needs identified in their research report.

Support for the Settlement Workers in the Schools Initiative

The research findings strongly support the need to have supports for newcomer youth and their families in educational settings where they can most easily be accessed. These kind of findings serve to reinforce the need to continue to fund and possibly expand the initiative of placing settlement workers in the schools.

This initiative was originally piloted and started in Ottawa several years ago and has since been expanded to Toronto schools. In the next year, CIC/OASIS plans to expand the program in Toronto to the Toronto Catholic District School Board and the French school boards. Over the next couple of years, CIC/OASIS plans to develop and implement similar initiatives in Kitchener-Waterloo, Peel, London, Windsor, York Region and Hamilton.

Development of Tools and Resources That Respond to the Settlement Needs of Immigrant Youth and Their Families

CIC/OASIS will continue to develop tools and resources that address some of the needs related to the settlement and integration of newcomer youth. For example, CIC/OASIS recently funded "Stranger Becoming Us", a teacher's resource kit for use in grades four to eight that includes a CD, lesson plans and student worksheets. The resource kit provides information on immigration that is accessible to teachers and students.

CIC/OASIS is also planning to fund some additional research that will study parenting issues of newcomer families in Ontario and the needs of immigrant youth who may be at risk.

Another example of a recently funded tool that will help the settlement and integration of newcomer youth and their families is the LINC Parenting Program: Manual and Curriculum Guidelines.*

Conclusion

I wanted to close my presentation with a few words that were quoted from Max Keeping and highlighted on the cover of one of the youth research projects. I think the quote reinforces the importance of providing support to newcomer youth and their families as they settle and integrate into Canadian society.

"The children of the world are all our children, and regardless of skin colour, regardless of class, we will all profit or pay for the way we treat them."

Endnotes

1 View the curriculum online at the AlphaPlus Centre Website at www.alphaplus.ca. Additionally, all of the research can be viewed at www.settlement.org.

"Putting the Pieces Together" Resource Catalogue, containing information on the research studies and other products developed recently for use in Immigrant Settlement Programs Across Ontario, can be obtained from CIC.

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