Study on Parenting Issues of Newcomer Families in Ontario

Summary and Recommendations

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Introduction

This report is the last report of seven reports written for a study on parenting issues of newcomer families in Ontario. This report provides a summary of main findings and recommendations from this eight-month research study. Funded by the Ontario Administration of Settlement and Integration Services (OASIS), the study was carried out by the Centre for Research and Education in Human Services (CREHS) and the Joint Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Settlement (CERIS) and their partners.

The purpose of this study was to explore the issues faced by immigrant parents within diverse ethnic backgrounds. The research also explored the supports and resources that could assist newcomer parents in addressing parenting issues. This was an exploratory study, unique in its provincial scope and number of ethnic communities involved.

We used a variety of methods in our study. We conducted an extensive review of literature, held in-depth personal interviews with 24 key informants in the three urban sites chosen for study, conducted focus groups involving parents from twelve countries in Toronto, Ottawa and the Waterloo region, and held 48 individual in-depth interviews with parents in Toronto in order to achieve greater insight into any differences among the three age cohorts (birth to 5, 6 to 13, 14 to 18). For each method a summary report was written outlining the research process and findings.

We begin this report by giving an overall summary of the research findings. The summary will include a brief review of the literature, followed by an explanation of the immigrant parenting framework used to gather information in the remaining methods. Key findings from these remaining methods will then be listed according to the framework categories.

The report ends with a series of recommendations organized into eleven areas. These recommendations are based on a synthesis of the main conclusions and recommendations from each of previous reports written according to method used.

Summary of Major Findings

Each of the methods employed in this study yielded concrete insights and themes, some of which are common across the methods. We will summarize the major findings revealed through the use of these various methodologies used in the study. Since the literature review extends well beyond the scope of the present study we will begin with a brief review of the major insights offered by the review.

Summary of Literature Review

Our literature examined the critical issues facing newcomer parents when raising children in a new society. We did this by looking at literature focusing on how parents from different cultures define "success" for their children, and how their parenting styles stem from those values. After looking at the differences in the belief structures of immigrant, refugee and Canadian-born parents, we examined the major challenges faced by newcomer parents and how they adapt to those challenges. Last, we examined recommendations put forth in the literature on immigrant parents, and the questions that remain unanswered by current academic literature on immigrant parenting. Below is a summary of this review.

Migrant parents comprise a remarkably diverse group. Each set of newcomer parents faces a unique set of problems, and deals with them using different strengths. Cultural background, economic class upon arrival, amount of social support, and the reasons for migrating to Canada: all of these factors determine the context with which newcomer parents will raise their children. Although many parenting experts in the West put forth the concept of "good parenting", there is no single style or method of parenting that has proven to be the "correct" method. The concept of good parenting is biased, because parents vary considerably in their individual values and priorities when raising children.

With the impact of culture on child rearing in mind, there are some caveats that should be stressed. First, some studies have found that there are some parenting practices that are consistent across newcomer and Canadian-born parents. Second, many researchers have found that parenting styles do not remain stagnant over time. As newcomer parents spend time in their new country and with their growing and changing children, they are more likely to have changed their original child-rearing behaviors. Thus, a parenting style is a malleable concept. Parents who have just arrived in the country may act quite different towards their children a few years, or even a few months later. Third, it is a generalization to maintain that parenting styles vary only by culture. Parenting styles are unique to almost every set of parents.

A pervasive theme in literature studying the impact of culture on parenting is the conviction that newcomer parents differ greatly from Canadian-born parents. Even when factors such as culture and socioeconomic background are isolated, newcomer parents are often distinctly different from Canadian-born parents because of their experience of coming to a new country to raise their families. Kao and Tienda offer the Immigrant Optimism Thesis to explain the relative success of immigrant newcomers in comparison to refugee and native-born parents. They argue that immigrants come to a new country in want of a fresh start, and bearing optimism that a new life is possible. This positive outlook distinguishes immigrants who elect on their own accord to move to a new place, and allows them to succeed in competition with others who possess more education or a greater socio-economic standing. In contrast, refugees who flee their native countries for

social or political reasons are usually impoverished, arriving in a new country with little assistance.

A majority of the literature studying different aspects in the lives of newcomer parents mentioned many parents' focus on attaining academic success for their children; many immigrant parents cite Canada's open, public education system as a key reason for moving away from their native country. Scholars have found that the priority placed on educational success often translates into high academic achievement for the children of newcomer parents. Time after time, studies find that newcomer children and the children of newcomer parents consistently outperform their native peers. Consistent with this is the finding that immigrant households are more likely to have rules about grades and homework rather than household chores, indicating the importance of achieving academic success.

Parenting in a new country is a difficult task because the caregiver is experiencing a new environment while simultaneously attempting to provide a stable environment for a family. While the majority of literature in this field begins with the examination of the hardships faced by newcomer families, many authors also uncover remarkable resolutions to those challenges. Nevertheless, immigrant and refugee families face considerable barriers when they attempt to build a life in a new country.

Many newcomer parents experience isolation during there first few months or years after arrival. Whether it is a conscious choice or not however, seclusion from the rest of society can initiate a host of other problems. Isolated parents do not have problem-solving support, access to cultural resources, or child-care assistance. Isolation and resulting absence of supportive interpersonal bonds often constitutes a serious source of stress. The mental health of parents has been found to influence developmental outcomes in children making it increasingly important to create services to mediate parental stress.

Scholars find the need for a social network extends beyond family members to include encouragement and support from the greater community. It should be recognized that female caregivers most commonly voice isolation, especially when raising children on their own because the family has migrated separately.

Research shows that more than 30 percent of new immigrant families were poor in comparison to 13.2 percent of native-born Canadian families. Thus, it is evident that immigrant and refugee families face barriers, including the hardships of poverty when they first arrive in their new homes. Immigrant poverty may be a transient period compared to the condition affecting impoverished native-born Canadians. New immigrant families who are poor seem better able to pull themselves out of poverty than native-born families.

Chronic unemployment or underemployment, difficulty with the English language, and the inability to appreciate the rapid acculturation of their children can often create feelings of depression and inadequacy for many newcomer parents. Many

researchers consider the socio-economic disparity between mainstream and newcomer groups to be the primary determinant of negative development and delayed acculturation.

Much of the research on diverse immigrant communities indicates that adult migrants tend to preserve the culture and lifestyle of their country of origin, while the second generation more readily accepts the norms and cultural practices of the country of resettlement. Parents often come into conflict with children over social conventions, gender roles and responsibilities, discipline, and proper behavior.

Children tend to learn new languages and adapt to cultural expectations more easily than adults and parents may feel as if they are losing control of their children, by losing respect as wise, older heads of the household. It is incorrect to portray the relationships within all immigrant and refugee families as a constant battle between parents and children over cultural issues. Some families embrace North American culture, while others fight to maintain the values and traditions that they observed in their native country.

Many studies report the frustration that some newcomer parents experience because they feel the Canadian social welfare and legal system undermines their authority. Thus, the social welfare system can provide 16-year-old children with social assistance if they were to leave home, while the legal system works with children to restrict parental control through accusations of abuse.

Migration can impact the entire composition of the traditional family and create major changes to family dynamics and relationships. When arriving in a new country, it can be a major shift to adjust to the absence of the many grandparents, neighbors and other family or community members who might have played an active childbearing role.

Children learn new languages quickly and often serve as family interpreters. This can often create problematic role reversals within the family. While parents are dependent on their children when operating in Canadian society, children become more independent through rapid acculturation and participation in peer relationships. Parents may feel their authority being undermined by having to rely on children when conducting public transactions in a language they don't understand. It is common for difficulties to arise in the parent-child relationship when children act as cultural brokers.

Kobayashi and others find that the tendency to use formal community services in Canada is connected to characteristics of each newcomer family. Thus, the likelihood of using community or social services declines for those from more recent non-traditional source areas (i.e., non-Western European countries), for those who do speak neither of the two official languages, and for those who live in areas with large concentrations of immigrants. The authors then argue that "barriers need to be broken down, especially in our largest cities where immigrants and new Canadians concentrate... the fact that the majority of immigrants are now visible minorities should not be ignored in an attempt to understand their experiences on arrival in Canada".

Lack of information is a serious problem for many newcomer parents. The majority of respondents to a survey in Halton had little or no knowledge about the critical issues that they would have to deal with in their settlement process. Other than receiving the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) and making an appointment with a doctor, few knew how to access other health care services (*e.g.*, for problems with mental health, drugs, alcohol, or nutrition).

Many newcomer parents find fault with their children's new school curriculum. For example, many parents may be concerned with elements of the curriculum that they perceive are in conflict with their religious beliefs. The cultural differences that exist between individual ethnic families and mainstream schools can create difficulties for newcomer parents. Sometimes, the expectations of parents and teachers vary considerably, both by the age of children and by the cultural background of parents.

While the importance that many newcomer parents place on educational success is indisputable, many newcomer children still struggle to stay in school. The marginalized economic position of newcomer parents in Canada may pressure youth to drop out of school in order to work and help support their families.

Moving to a new country can often have unforeseen effects on the structure of a newcomer family. If, for example, both parents are not able to migrate with their children, one parent may not have contact for long periods of time. This situation can and often does have negative effects on relationships between adults in the family, and the ties between parents and their children.

Framework for Understanding Immigrant Parenting

Understanding parenting issues is complex. It is even more complex in the context of immigration. To help us focus our work and remain true to our study's objectives, we developed a framework for understanding immigrant parenting (see diagram below).

The framework for understanding issues of immigrant parenting was developed by the study team after an initial review of parenting literature. It was later refined after initial analysis of data collected through the study. As such, the framework builds on existing parenting models but it greatly expands and adapts these models into the immigrant context.

A Framework for Understanding
Immigrant Parenting

Orientation → Styles → **Canadian Context**

Contributions

Supports Needed

Modifications
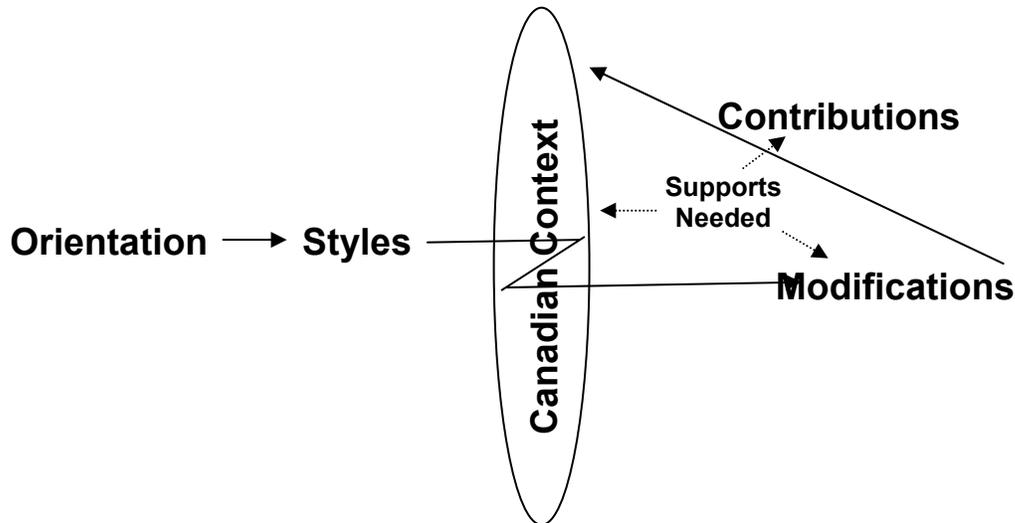
The framework begins with *parenting orientations*. Orientations are the beliefs, biases and values that form a parent's expectations for their children's behaviours and hopes for their children's futures. Parenting orientations include the values parents want to pass on to their children (what makes a "good" child), the qualities that parents should adopt (what makes a "good" parent), and the aspirations or future goals parents have for their children.

Parenting styles are the implementation of parenting orientations. Parenting styles include the ways that parents relate to and interact with their children. In other words, parenting styles are how people go about doing parenting; how they shape their children and the relationships they build with them.

The *Canadian context* is an intervention, or filter, potentially impacting the parenting orientations and parenting styles of newcomers. As new Canadians, immigrant parents have entered into a new context. Our interest in this study has been to understand what immigrant parents perceive to be the Canadian way of parenting. These ways of parenting might be similar or different to the ones that they themselves hold.

Parenting modifications are the changes that immigrants make in their parenting orientation and styles as a result of living within the Canadian context. When people move to a new place, they often find that they have to adjust to new ways that are different from their home country. The participants in this study have lived in Canada for three years or less. This relatively short period of time limited the understanding of parenting modifications that might be made over a longer period of time.

Parenting contributions are those ways in which immigrants contribute to an understanding and practice of parenting within Canada. The immigrant settlement process has frequently been described as a reciprocal relationship between immigrants and the host society. This "two-way street" understanding of settlement acknowledges that immigrants not only adapt to their new home, but that they also influence and shape this society.

The final component in our framework deals with the *parenting supports* available and needed for immigrant parents. Though this component is not included in the summary of findings, it will be argued in the following recommendations section that parenting supports are needed to help immigrant parents understand and settle within their new Canadian context, to help them through the process of parenting modifications, and to help encourage mutual exchange around parenting issues between immigrants and other Canadians.

Summary of Findings from Key Informants and Immigrant Parents

Main findings from key informants and immigrant parents are listed below according to the categories within our immigrant parenting framework. Where warranted, differences between mothers and fathers are noted, as are differences between children of the three different age cohorts (0-5; 6-13; 14-18). Our analysis of information found fewer notable differences between language groups and fewer still among participants from different cities.

Parenting Orientations

- Key informants reflected on gender related difficulties pertaining to discipline and challenges to gender roles. By way of illustration there is often an expectation that one gender is primarily responsible for disciplining and rearing the children. This person will then be blamed for any difficulties with children that occur during the settlement process and seen as a failure by the spouse and community. In nearly all cases discussed with informants this difficulty was one faced primarily by women, although disciplinary responsibilities were sometimes shared. Additionally, parents may find themselves occupying untraditional roles (e.g. males who accompany their children to daycare when they feel they should be working).
- Three main themes emerged about the guiding beliefs and values of parents. The first dealt with the value of respect, the second with the importance of the family, and the third with the passing of traditional religion and culture on to their children. While the themes of respect and family were common across all language groups, there were differences of opinions across groups on the significance of maintaining religion and culture. Parents who perceived their culture as being very different from Canadian culture expressed greater concern about the risk of their children's rejection of their inherited culture and assimilation into the Canadian culture. Some parents believed their cultures would be better preserved by limiting contact with other groups and promoting their distinctive identity as a cultural group. Others believed their children

should learn to function successfully in both cultures by interacting with people from both.

- In the individual interviews of parents in Toronto, the themes that emerged were slightly different: (1) The moral character of children. This refers to being a good person who knows right from wrong. This category includes the value of respect of others. (2) Values of culture and family. These seem to go together, as the definition of family is a cultural value (e.g. who is family, how to treat family members, ideas about closeness of family). (3) Education and employment. Parents want their children to become valued members of society, and education and good jobs are seen as a route toward this goal.

- Most participants were very optimistic of their children's future in Canada. Participants often said that they were hoping their children would have a better life than they themselves had. These high expectations were held despite the fact that many parents were struggling, even making personal sacrifices in order to provide for their families here in Canada. However, a significant number of parents also expressed their fear of their sons' involvement in drugs and violence and their daughters' in pre-marital sexual relationships.

- The most common hope those parents, particularly fathers, had for their children had to do with their long-term economic security. This resolve in ensuring a financially stable future for children was common across all language groups. Education was usually seen as the key to an economically successful future.

- There were other hopes, in addition to economic ones, that parents had for their children. All language groups mentioned that they hoped their children would adopt good values. However, as we previously mentioned, what constituted "good values" differed among groups.

- Parents also hoped that their children would be healthy and happy when they grew up. Often, health and happiness were related to having children create and reach their own goals and pursue their own personal interests. Their aspirations for their sons and daughters related to their expectations of their future primary roles, as providers or as nurturers of families. In addition, parents voiced the aspiration that their children would help to shape and improve Canadian society.

Parenting Style

- When talking about parenting styles, participants often mentioned two perquisite roles that parents needed to adopt. These roles were foundational to any further role a parent was to take in shaping their child's future. One role was to be a "provider and protector" have their children, and the other was to provide "unconditional love".

- Supporting children in their educational pursuits was an important element in providing for the future economic stability of a child. Parents spoke about helping their children with their homework, although this was sometimes difficult given a different educational system.

- Parents spoke of four main types of parenting actions to help them to shape their children. These main types of actions include "responding to bad", "preventing bad", "presenting good", and "promoting well-being". Parents from all cultures generally

performed all types of actions. The first three main categories of parenting actions (i.e., responding to bad, preventing bad, presenting good) can be seen as dealing with issues of morality. That is, parents saw their role as helping their children to understand the difference between what is good and what is bad. It was this role as moral guide that dominated the discussion on parenting styles.

- The final main category of parenting action (i.e., promoting well being) was different in nature. The promotion of well-being was seen less as having to do with shaping good behavior but had more to do with shaping well-adjusted adults who are able to reach their potential. In comparison to the other categories, less information was gathered about this category.

- For most participants, shaping their children was a moral responsibility to teach children the difference between right and wrong. Most discussions focused on how to discipline children with few language differences noted. Mothers tended to use a broader variety of discipline methods, while fathers focused on more intensive methods such as lecturing their child or corporal punishment. Mothers dealt with disciplinary issues more often while fathers were called upon to address the more serious issues. Girls were disciplined in a more 'gentle' manner than boys, especially as they grew older.

- In the focus groups in Toronto and Ottawa parents favored a more 'direct' approach for disciplining younger children, such as withdrawing privileges, verbal reprimands and physical punishment. With older children they used more reasoning, explanations and demonstration. Another difference that arose in the individual interviews between mothers and fathers was that many mothers but no fathers talked about using a gentler approach with younger children, while older children need a firmer hand.

- Despite the common theme of unconditional love mentioned across all language groups, there was an undercurrent of firmness in participant's comments. Parents generally expressed a need to use their power as an adult to influence and control their child's behaviors and to teach them values. In the individual interviews, two separate patterns emerged: (1) a traditional approach, in which parents direct, mold, set rules, and hold power over children; and (2) an egalitarian approach in which parents see themselves as their children's friends, and aim at good communication and trust between parents and children. This approach emphasizes negotiation rather than giving orders and rules. The two approaches can also co-exist, as some parents expressed both kinds of behaviours.

- Mandarin and Serbo-Croatian parents, and some mothers across other groups put a strong emphasis on promoting the long-term well-being of children through the building of mutual, nurturing and long-term relationships between parent and child.

- In the individual parent interviews, some parents commented on how Canadians don't see parenting as a lifelong process, but in their cultures parenting is a lifelong process and continues even after the child becomes an adult.

Canadian Context-Perception of Canadian Parenting

- With regard to ethnicity and race key informants mentioned that immigrant parents encounter everyday stereotyping and discrimination in some service sectors, in stores,

or on the street because of their accents, skin color, religious practices, and styles of clothing. Another theme that surfaced relates to equity and language access. Thus, agencies or schools may not respond to the presence of different cultures and languages in the surrounding community by advertising in different languages, providing translators, translating forms and information and understanding the needs of the community.

- Newcomer parents, especially fathers, believed their employment-related difficulties since their arrival had negatively influenced their roles as parents. Their unemployment/underemployment status and financial constraints had decreased their self-confidence and lowered their esteem as parents.

- Immigrant parents admitted that the process of discovering and learning about the Canadian ways of parenting has been ongoing. From time to time newcomers find out something that challenges their stereotypes and knowledge.

- Most newcomers are in the process of discovering Canadian cultural values and behaviors. This education occurs mostly through learning the necessary language skills and observing others. Since immigrant parents have very little contact with Canadian parents, it is difficult for them to compare and draw a distinction between the Canadian way of raising a family and their own. However, parents had developed a lot of views and attitudes about Canadian parents and families, by observing people in public places.

- Immigrant parents express a fear of modern society as going away from "true values" in life. They emphasize the danger and struggle in focusing on individualism and competitiveness. However, a number of other parents embraced modern society and its values, and welcomed change.

- Major similarities in parenting with other families in Canada included emphasizing the well being of their children. Parents also want their children to become respectful, responsible and productive.

- Major differences included ways of disciplining, the extent of family closeness and boundaries of love based on religious, cultural and lifestyle differences. "Normal" relationships where the father is the breadwinner and the mother takes care of children are challenged in Canada, and the idea of "dating" is opposed to the way many immigrant parents were themselves raised. Many immigrant parents feel that there is little respect shown by Canadian children towards their elders and little involvement of grandparents and the extended family and community in raising children.

- In the individual parent interviews, there was a somewhat different but significant pattern. Although most parents commented on the above differences in family relations and parenting, they interpreted them in two different and contrasting ways. One group of parents thought the changes were positive, bringing family members closer because of less status differentiation between family members, while another group of parents perceived the differences as a threat to the traditional values, including traditional family hierarchy.

- Study participants put major emphasis on education and school. They often found a second job or borrowed money to help children concentrate on education.

- In the view of many immigrant parents, sex education is inappropriate, as are some of the behaviors of boys, girls and adults in public. In the individual interviews, many parents expressed concern with their children's sexuality, including dating, premarital sex, and promiscuity.
- Many immigrant parents express the opinion that Canadian families use TV as the main source of family knowledge. Children are exposed to TV too much and what children see on TV makes parenting difficult for newcomers. In the individual parent interviews, the danger of TV relates to the corruption of children's morality as they are exposed to too much (i.e. sex and violence) at too young an age.
- The Canadian lifestyle and parenting styles emphasize independence and respect for children's privacy. Immigrant parents saw Canadians as being more liberal in disciplining children than immigrants. They take good care of small children ("until 12 years old kids are under complete control…they cannot stay alone at home"), but allow older children to be raised without many guidelines ("after 13 years old children have too much independence, spend most time outside homes and earning money").
- There were two views on this among the parents in the individual interviews: some liked it and others did not. Children's independence was seen to be very positive by some parents, while others thought it was a way toward moral ruin and unhappy families.

Modifications—Parenting in Transition

- Most key informants indicated that they worked mostly with women/mothers in parenting classes and wished they had ways to respond to the needs of men, in that men often suffer from role confusion, a loss of identity and self-esteem within the family.
- This theme came out very strongly in the individual interviews with parents. There were some fathers who indicated serious problems with their self-esteem and their capacity to parent under conditions where their status has diminished. On the other hand, a large number of fathers also indicated that their families had become closer and benefited because they were at home more (if unemployed), or that their diminished capacity to earn money had led to more mutual support within the family.
- Another important group that needs to be especially noted are immigrant mothers who are single parents. They face enormous obstacles, particularly poverty, which prevents them from creating the life for their children that they want them to have.
- Many focus group participants reported that they have given more freedom to their children since living in Canada.
- Some parents spend more time with children now in Canada compared to time spent in their home countries. The reasons include, lack of employment and isolation in new environment.
- Some parents spend less time with children now in Canada compared to time spent in their countries. The reasons include, shift work, long hours at work, parents' schoolwork and factors related to the independence of older children (i.e., children working after school).

- Many parents who used to be strict and reactive towards children behavior now try to be more permissive and proactive in their parenting strategies.
- Many immigrant parents also reported showing more tolerance towards their children since coming to Canada. This tolerance was developed because of three main factors: 1) the parents' understanding and awareness of adaptation challenges children face, 2) the influences of Canadian culture, and 3) the role reversals in immigrant families (i.e. a child translating a phone call to his/her parents).
- Parenting modifications depend on children's age and their developmental changes. Parents with small children are more likely to give up teaching children their mother tongue and their background culture than parents of older children. Parents of older children change their disciplining strategies more than parents with small children.
- All immigrant parents resist the power reversals in family roles related to children playing important/adult functions as translators, interpreters, negotiators or information providers.
- Some immigrant parents equalize relationships with their children by giving up their control and relating to children more as friends. In their parenting they focus on positive relationships that facilitate well-being and health promotion.

Key informant identified the following major issues faced by immigrant parents in transition with regard to each child age cohort.

Age Cohort 0-5

- Finding daycare offered in conjunction with ESL classes
    - Finding out where and how to get information about services
    - Parental expectations in Canada, i.e. often parents are unaware of the legalities/parameters of disciplining acceptable in Canada.
    - Behavioral expectations of children i.e., in a daycare setting
    - Maintaining a nutritious, balanced diet for their children using 'Canadian Food' so as not to embarrass their children in front of fellow Students and some educators by sending home-cooked ethnic food to School.

Age Cohort 6-13

- Parents experience the same issues as noted above with the age cohort 0-5.
- Many parents coming from states with authoritarian regimes such as the former Soviet Union fear the state/government and its institutions such as police and social services.
- Many parents are threatened by children saying that any form of discipline is abuse. In general, disciplining becomes more difficult as,
    - a) children are better able to communicate in English over time whereas often the parents' English language skills progress much slower or seemingly not at all.

    b) parents feel dis-empowered and embarrassed because they find themselves jobless or with a job which does not garner respect from their children and society.

    c) parents feel frustrated because they lack the economic resources to access recreational facilities for this age group.

    d) parents feel detached and disconnected as children develop relationships outside the home (i.e. friends and the parents cannot interact because they speak different languages).

    e) parents feel frustrated and disappointed as the children question and/or reject their home culture and language.

    f) parents are worried about the influence of television on their children. Since they are uncomfortable with English they are uncertain what is being watched.

    g) parents want information about schools but it is difficult to access because of language barriers and lack of knowledge about the organizational culture and structure of schools

    h) parents feel unsure and worried as pre-teens want independence and engage in non-traditional behaviors, i.e. talking to the opposite sex on the phone, dating.

Age Cohort 14-18

- Parents experience the same issues as noted above with the age cohort 6-13 (points a-f).
- Relationships between parents and child(ren) becomes strained as:
      a) parental versus child's educational values are not consistent, i.e. child wishes to work outside the home to buy material goods that matter to their sense of identity and inclusion in greater society, parents desire that time is spent studying.
      b) parental versus child's family values are not consistent i.e. child desires to spend time with friends/girlfriend/boyfriend, parents wish child to spend time with the family.
      c) child seeks advice outside the community- i.e. child talks to teachers, counselors, friends and not with parents.
      d) child confronts failures, i.e. many immigrant teenagers have a lot of difficulty finding part-time employment since they may not have the prerequisite experience expected for their age, references or the knowledge-base to apply for jobs and/or write résumés.
      d) the reversal of traditional roles with children is most prominent in this age cohort.

Recommendations

In the previous section, the main issues facing immigrant families around their parenting responsibilities were identified. The summary was organized according to the first four categories of the immigrant parenting framework (i.e., parenting orientations, styles, Canadian context and modifications).

In this section, we will focus on the final categories of the framework, namely the *supports* that will empower immigrant to fulfill their parenting responsibilities, and ways to maximize the potential *contributions* of immigrants to Canadian society. To this end we reviewed the various components of the project (i.e., review of the literature, interviews with key informants, focus group findings in three cities, and the follow-up individual interviews), and saw that a series of remarkably consistent recommendations emerged.

It appears that immigrant families and those who have studied and worked with them identify eleven areas in which they would recommend change in Canadian policies and practices. These recommendations are based on a synthesis of the main conclusions of the five other reports. The final recommendations were reviewed and refined by the project's steering committee.

Addressing each of these areas of concern as categories of recommendations, we find that they may be summarized under these headings:

1. education,
2. language support (English learning and translation),
3. culture, first language and religion,
4. extracurricular activities for children,
5. family housing,
6. employment-related supports,
7. specific parenting support,
8. holistic family support,
9. mental health,
10. collaboration among service providers and funders, and
11. further research and information.

While the recommendations themselves will be presented, it is useful to summarize the thrust or major concerns of each category. Each of the eleven categories of recommendations generated many individual suggestions. The following is a compendium, by type, of the various ideas put forward by respondents to this study. While there were some that overlapped and others that represented the reflection of only a few individuals, since this is a qualitative rather than a quantitative piece of research, all are presented here in summary form so as to give full representation to the work of those who took part in the discussions, as well as to the work of the other sources mentioned above.

1. Education

It is the school system that occupies much of the discussion and is the focus of many of the recommendations. Families believe more could be done both before they leave their countries of origin and after they arrive here to give them a much better introduction to the provincial and local systems of education that they encounter. First, differences in educational philosophies between their own cultures and those of Canadians need to be made clear. Second, their interaction with the local school is often weak because of language difficulties. Both before their English is sufficiently fluent and afterwards, families should be integrated into the workings of the community school, at first through translated administrative materials and interpreters, and then through integration into the associations, councils, and actual activities of the schools, both as volunteers and as paid professionals, in the latter case through the employment of qualified members of their community.

Third, this integration needs occur in equally profound ways through the culturally broadened curriculum taught to all children, as well as through improved training of classroom teachers of all backgrounds, to eliminate the racism and discrimination that immigrant children and their families encounter. Further education of all Canadians about immigration and immigrants will also make their experiences as parents in a new country much smoother, as will creative evening programming for immigrant adults, especially in matters related to helping their children with schoolwork, including use of the internet.

The synthesis of recommendations are listed below:

- provide general information for all parents, including immigrants, about education, and ensure that there is a structure of support for dealing with the educational system
- provide similar support for all parents to understand school, college, and university systems so that they can guide their children appropriately
- provide school documents (letters to parents, e.g.) in their first language, or provide a structure for their quick and easy translation, including report cards
- provide interpretation support for parent-teacher conferences that will preserve the privacy of the family
- mandate new and better cross-cultural awareness and anti-racism training for teachers and students, since parents find that refugee and immigrant children are subjected to racism and xenophobia in school systems
- provide information about educational institutions for children of all ages (and for adults) to be communicated systematically to new immigrants, both before and after arrival
- provide opportunities for training to parents for gaining access to information technology (how to use a library electronic catalogue, the Internet)
- include Boards of Education, school boards, and school administrators in addition to teachers, in the new training that is recommended; controversial issues such as sex education, dress and diet codes must be included in such curricula, which must be

designed to promote acceptance and cross cultural awareness in schools

- ensure representation of immigrant parents on school boards and other decision-making bodies in schools, to provide for their input into curriculum and standards of discipline, and their better understanding of teaching styles
- make services of translators and interpreters available in schools, and have a formal event to make such service visible; an information and social evening for parents of an immigrant or refugee group newly arrived in the community was suggested as an example
- provide for employment of multi-lingual teachers and appropriate sharing of their skills within and across schools
- mandate education abroad in consulates: more and better information of what to expect prior to arrival in Canada should be provided
- provide education for all new arrivals: information about services, entitlement to them, and how to access them; ensure this is done in their own languages, in the role of the school as the gateway to Canadian life for immigrant families, a role it should have clear policies about fulfilling, which are updated as the communities it serves change
- educate Canadians about importance of immigrants
- educate Canadians about the experience of being an immigrant

2. Language Support: English Learning and Translation

The first need is for translation support for documents that immigrant parents bring with them, to facilitate their acquisition of appropriate placement in training, education, and employment. Beyond this, the call is for English and more English: first, for parents in flexible modes that recognize work and child care obligations, and concurrently for children in the schools. English until they are fluent is their goal, rather than special, time-limited courses. This training includes opportunities for informal discussions designed to improve conversational English, whether through summer camps and classes for children and youth or community centre programs for their parents.

The synthesis of recommendations follows:

- provide extensive and ongoing English language training for all adults who need it
- ensure that it is offered at different times, to provide genuine opportunities for those working different shifts, and provide more child care so that it is not only available to those without responsibilities for young children
- ensure a more intensive and extensive ESL training in the schools
- provide a structure of informal opportunities to speak English, such as programs in community centres that are designed for enhancing spoken English
- support service providers in translating their brochures
- where possible, provide more services in first languages for newcomers
- structure appropriate and inexpensive services for the translation of personal documents needed for work, health, education, etc.

3. Culture, First Language and Religion

Support for first language retention by their children was critically important for immigrant parents. This was not just for reasons of sentiment, although these are important, but also for reasons of supporting familial interaction across generations, and preserving the access to support that their children can have when they have command of the first language of their community. In addition, families would like the opportunity to incorporate elements of their own culture into the celebrations of the local community and into the curriculum of the schools. They asked that local communities acquire sensitivity to the elements of their religion that may be unfamiliar, and suggest this will result from the implementation of some of their suggestions for educational systems.

Other recommendations include:

- incorporate more instruction in more first languages into school curriculum
- offer support to celebrate an immigrant group's important festivals through the community, and particularly the schools
- local communities should make it possible for immigrant groups to access culturally appropriate activities. For example, through shared facilities in smaller towns; support for this from government bodies responsible for settlement could help to offset some of the costs associated with such additional use of facilities in the early stages of group settlement and integration
- make an informed effort to enrich curriculum content (e.g., in social studies, language arts) to reflect diversity
- at all levels, support developing curriculum materials (e.g. textbooks, play food & toys, art, music and sports) to reflect diversity
- more support to appropriate parents and community leaders to teach language and culture in schools
- realize that the community's own religious organizations are well situated to support new Canadian families, and enhance their ability to provide settlement assistance
- strengthen specific program support to families provided by religious organizations, particularly to assist them to address the fear some families have of their sons turning to drugs and their daughters to promiscuity

4. Extracurricular Activities for Children

Here the thrust is first of all on supporting children and youth in establishing good friendships to replace those lost through migration, and secondly, on designing and using programs to facilitate academic success for the children, by linking such activities to English acquisition and tutoring, as needed. Recommendations include:

- provide more activities for children and youth, especially those arriving as pre-teens

or teenagers, to develop close friendships; this is an especially acute need the older the child is, and school-linked extracurricular activities should be particularly promoted for this group

- fund after-school programs for children, including tutoring support for children
- provide ESL summer camps or schools particularly for high school students
- structure support for opportunities for children of all ages to develop networks of friends to compensate for the loss of social networks for both parents and children that occurred through migration (e.g., buddy or other befriending programs)

5. Affordable Family Housing

Since immigrants typically are destined to urban areas, housing is a serious problem for them, particularly in the larger urban centres that are the magnet for new Canadians because of their economic opportunities. Needed are an introduction to housing laws, regulations, and policies on the one hand, and on the other, actual assistance in finding suitable, affordable housing for families. Specific recommendations identified are:

- provide increased programming linking immigrants and other parents who need them with suitable housing for families, taking into account what is needed for raising children in a healthy environment
- design and implement programs to introduce families to housing types and programs in Canada, including understanding real estate practices for renters and purchasers

6. Employment-related Supports

Consistently four types of needs emerge: support for evaluating accurately and then recognizing officially the qualifications of immigrants; support for upgrading their training to make it more appropriate for a Canadian setting; support for linking them to appropriate jobs; and support for ending discrimination in hiring and promotion. In this study parents saw assistance to their employment not only as necessary for being good providers, but as necessary to demonstrate to their children that the outcomes of good education include good employment –so they should work hard and stay in school! Recommended for improved policy and practice in this area are the following:

- offer good language programs to help parents learn English faster, and work-related English programs, to make them more employable
- offer upgrading or re-tooling programs specific to supporting parents to get Canadian jobs appropriate to their education and training; these include job search support, skills training, and better access to professions and trades through foreign qualification recognition and accreditation
- return to and extend employment equity programs, to eliminate discrimination in hiring and promotion

- provide more programs to help parents find employment, in order that parents be seen as better role models for their children on the positive outcomes of education.

7. Specific Parenting Support

Four major thrusts appear here. First, immigrant families feel the need for practical parenting courses that will introduce them to Canadian policies, philosophies, and programs related to parenting. This type of parent education will be sensitive to the cultural backgrounds of the parents taking the course, and will present understandings of different cultural approaches to child development as well as legal and practical issues around disciplining children, and the more urgent demands of meeting the basic needs of the children in a new setting.

Second, there was another critical element to the request for parenting support among immigrants. This element was unique to their experience as immigrant parents. Specifically, they wanted support through the process of parenting modifications; of understanding Canadian parenting ways, and how to adapt their own parenting approaches in ways that considered both Canadian society and their own values. It was not just a matter of translating or having interpretation available for Canadian parenting programs. Parenting supports needed to address the issues of the immigration process on parenting. The end result of these types of supports would be for immigrant parents to regain a sense of control as parents.

Third, the families identify a need for recognition of child care responsibilities, and assistance with this around the long hours they are working or studying, and in all the programs offered for their integration into Canadian society.

And finally, they point out the sense of supporting an increase of family-class immigration, and the elimination of barriers to it, so that they and their children may have the support of other family members in confronting the challenges of adapting to and succeeding in a new country. Specifically, recommendations found from all sources include:

- provide adequate and appropriate child care services for all parents
- increase family-class immigration, to give the support of the extended family to parents, children, and youth alike

- offer programs with attendant child care designed specifically to meet the needs of lone parent families; single mothers, with financial problems
- similarly, fathers face challenges in parenting both with the additional obstacles they face to finding good employment and with related new roles in child rearing; these new parenting challenges should be addressed as well as their employment-related issues, to alleviate the added stress from status loss that may result in a rigid, authoritarian style of parenting that can be alienating for their children
- provide more information about family law and issues related to child abuse, including the roles and responsibilities of the Children's Aid Societies
- provide information on the use of physical discipline of children, which parents fear as being illegal in Canada, and even more importantly, provide good information on alternatives to physical punishment in instilling self-discipline in children
- create and implement a good plan of dissemination of true facts about parenting, to counterbalance inaccurate impressions derived from mass media and second-hand reports from their children
- offer parenting programs for immigrant and nonimmigrant alike that address the challenges of parenting pre-teens and teenagers, as worries around many issues among parents of these age groups are not limited to immigrants
- offer parenting courses that take into account the cultural backgrounds and immigration experiences of parents, and offer them in the first language where necessary; such courses should include such practical issues as: proper/warm clothes for children in Canada, and where to obtain them reasonably; how Canadian families of various incomes address the challenges of fulfilling material demands of children; how to obtain assistance in acquiring sports equipment or learning material (e.g., computers); in general, where to shop at reasonable prices; how to provide a hot meal at lunch time when children cannot come home for lunch; and general information about resources available for children and parents that are either free or accessible even for families with low incomes.
- Adapt content of existing parenting supports to recognize the challenges of immigration on parenting (i.e., acknowledge the process of parenting modifications: balancing their old country values and approaches with Canadian parenting ways).

8. Holistic Family Support

The importance here is for families to be seen as one part of the ecosystem that supports their children: all other Canadian institutions should be attuned to what it takes to support immigrant families as parents. From their first days in Canada, they should be provided both with material in their first language that helps them situate themselves in their new context, and with Canadian hosts who will undertake to introduce them to the range of activities and services that Canadian families see as helpful in raising children. Many of our sources recommend:

- provide in first languages information on a wide range of topics for families first arriving in Canada, such as on Canadian culture, money management, parental roles, the expectations of the education system and the roles of teachers, as well as

acceptable behaviour and mainstream values; this should go far beyond the OHIP information currently provided, and should be provided in a systematic way, rather than in the current "patchwork quilt" approach

- recognize that parents whose culture was very different from Canadian culture experience greater concern about the risk of their children's rejection of their inherited culture and assimilation into the Canadian culture, and provide family programming in community centres to assist in family unity, and in families' remaining supportive of each other.
- increase support for Canadian parent "hosts", to facilitate introducing immigrant families to a wide range of experiences and issues in parenting in Canada

9. Support for Emotional and Mental Well-being

This category offers an elaboration of the previous set of recommendations. Specifically, immigrant families see links with other families of their background as essential to easing their worries about the challenges they are facing. Institutional structures to facilitate this intra-ethnic communication and networking around challenges to them as new Canadian families are particularly valuable, and they expressed great relief at the research process that gave them an opportunity to share their concerns and strategies with other parents going through the same challenges. But they also see ties with Canadian families as both enlightening and supportive.

Beyond this, they recommend programs in local communities specifically designed to foster intergenerational relationships and healthy family dynamics, as the experiences of parents and children in integrating into Canada differ considerably. The role reversal that occurs so often needs to be eliminated wherever possible (by recommendations made elsewhere, for employment and language supports), and programs, religious and otherwise, should be designed to meet the challenges to mental health arising out of the stress of migration and settlement. Recommendations identified in the various parts of the research include:

- expand programs that would facilitate the formation of surrogate extended families, to provide culture shock "survival strategies", and help newcomers cope with suspicion, hostility and discrimination they encounter, and break down social isolation
- ensure all newcomers have obtained their health cards and understand that all Canadians are entitled to use them
- structure programs to recognize the fact that family members adjust and acculturate at different rates, yet still need to stay together as a family
- provide translation programs for families to interact with mainstream service providers, so that children do no have to play inappropriately adult roles within the family, serving as translators in areas they would not normally be privy to, with both parents and children suffering from the role reversal
- provide information on access to financial assistance, recognizing that financial strains are some of the major threats to the mental and emotional well-being of the family, especially that derived from its opportunity to be together and to interact as a family

- provide assistance in overcoming mental health problems
- provide peer support parenting programs within the cultural group, for discussion and sharing of common problems and potential solutions; in general, programs that enable families to meet others from their own background are an enormous source of emotional support for new Canadians
- provide support groups with Canadian families

10. Collaboration among Service Providers and Funders

Three foci emerge here: employers should make sure that those hired to provide families with both mainstream and community-specific services are culturally knowledgeable and linguistically competent; funders should consult frequently with front-line workers and their clients; and the process of funding should be as informed and efficient as possible. Ideally, those providing services should not only speak their language and be sensitive to their culture but also be in a position to facilitate intra-ethnic group support, that is, to enhance the capacity of the community to serve its own members well. Recommendations include:

- fund settlement programming for newcomers so that there is continuity from month to month, year to year, as one-time grants are too time consuming to administer, too disruptive to the already overburdened front-line organizations and too short-lived to support adequately the real needs of communities
- require more collaboration and meaningful dialogue between parties that are involved in service delivery
- hire more workers from the immigrant communities, and use them for more than translation, by providing mainstream training for them, enhancing their capacity to shape further mainstream training for all workers in the field
- design policies and provide training to workers to encourage them to use a community development model in interacting with newcomers, so as to enhance the organization-building skills of immigrant communities
- support the hiring of skilled and sensitive social workers, teachers, police officers and service providers who can speak the languages of new communities
- carry out frequent and consistent consultation with community leaders and centres that service new immigrants in a variety of ways
- obtain accurate numbers of refugee families, and fund accordingly, as their needs are insufficiently met, yet their children's needs for good and well-supported parenting are great
- streamline the processes of obtaining and accounting for funding as far as is reasonable, to eliminate where possible the time taken away from client program delivery by paper work

11. Further Research and Information

Again, three types of recommendations appeared, urging researchers to examine the meaning of immigration and settlement for children, and its implications in their lives, to examine the implications of a sense of otherness or distance between and among groups in Canada, both immigrant and native-born, and to examine the implications for policy and program delivery of the different ways in which immigrant families experience the migration and settlement process. In particular, the experiences of immigrant families of the youngest group of children are not well documented in research, and this gap in knowledge should be addressed.

- How do children make sense of their immigration and settlement experience? How does that affect their future as Canadians?
- What are some pros and cons of the "distance" or "boundaries" between immigrant groups and "Canadians"? And among various immigrant groups? If this is a potential problem, how can it be addressed?
- When the cultural distance between an immigrant group and "mainstream Canada" as the new families perceive it seems very great, what are the ways that these families may be assisted in helping their children to settle successfully in Canada while still retaining their cultural identity and remaining well integrated into their own families?
- How may differences in the experiences of various immigrant groups and of parents of children of different age groups require different settlement programs?

Discussion: "For the Sake of the Children"

Throughout the eleven sets of recommendations, it is clear that the focus of those interviewed was the children, and the ways in which parents feel that they have much to offer their children to help them succeed in Canada, but desire the necessary support to make sure this happens. Immigrant families bring with them a considerable store of cultural capital, that is, the values, beliefs, behavioural codes, and practices of a cultural group. Since they prize this cultural capital, they hope to see it recognized and valued in the new society, lest the devaluation of it undermine their children's sense of self worth as members of a respected group. They hope, moreover, to see it as a basis for a contribution they can make to the receiving society, whether it be the "high culture" of their most esteemed artists, writers, musicians, and philosophers, or their folk culture.

This cultural capital is not only the basis for helping them to situate their children in two worlds, however, the old and the new; it is also one means of building social capital within their group. That is, the shared language, values, and beliefs can assist the community, when they are supported in maintaining their ties, in raising their children collaboratively, solving together the challenges of parenting in a new culture, and retaining family strength in the face of new obstacles to it. These ties, the networks that comprise social capital, can be a source of bridging as well as building: besides strengthening the immigrant community, they can lead to additional linkages to the

broader community, with all that that entails of enhanced economic and opportunities for successful settlement.

The institutional completeness that characterized so many of Canada's earlier immigrant groups was the result of their holding on to their cultural capital, translating it into social capital, and using those resources to build for themselves strong institutions and community development within their ethnic groups (Troper & Weinfeld, 1999). But those institutions also served as bridging mechanisms, as they provided launching pads for entry into professional associations, politics, and membership and leadership in broader community organizations, from the United Way through local Rotary clubs, and the civic participation of each ethnic group grew proportionately, as discrimination against the "unknown" diminished.

Whether institutional completeness is a stage that all groups must go through in order to achieve full civic participation is debatable (Hein, 1997; Bankston, 1998; Van Dijk, 1998; Weinfeld, 2000); we may well have other models in the making among newer immigrant groups, although this is not yet established (Goldenberg & Haines, 1992; Elazar & Weinfeld, 2000), and certainly the eradication of racism and discrimination ought not wait on new developments in immigrants' own struggles for success in settlement and integration.

In the meantime, immigrant parents need to have their cultural capital celebrated, their social capital strengthened, and their human capital, in the form of language and skills, enhanced and recognized. This will enable them to parent effectively, and make their own contributions and those of their children more assured.

In a study conducted almost ten years ago by one of the authors, a Salvadorean father who was hired as a facilitator to conduct focus groups with Spanish-speaking immigrants remarked to her:

> You know, for the sake of our children we sacrifice everything to come here –we sacrifice our family and friends, our standing in our own communities, our sense of who we are and what we can do– but we do it gladly, because it is for the children, to give them a better life. What we do not know is that we will be asked to make an even bigger sacrifice: we will be asked to give up our children, as they become not children we know and understand, but Canadian children, and so we lose them.

What parents and those who work with them assert in this study is that it is not necessary that immigrant families be asked "to give up [their] children", but rather that enlightened Canadian policies, programs, and practices can make it possible for immigrant families and their children not only to build together, as families, their own resources, their human, social, and cultural capital, but also to enhance that of the larger Canadian society.

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