



Is Settlement a “Family affair”? Families as Sources of Support and Stress during Newcomer Settlement

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Two Views of Immigrant Settlement

Flexible Immigrant: Immigration policy begins with the “flexible” view of immigrants in designing and implementing settlement services by assuming that individuals are sufficiently resilient, autonomous and self-reliant enough to achieve economic and social independence

Effect: Essentially leaves immigrants on their own to implement strategies to manage their settlement problems

versus

Supported Immigrant: In contrast, we view settlement and integration as a collective process. Many immigrants either arrive in, or become enmeshed in, a web of family and community relations, meaning that settlement represents a collective enterprise

Effect: Settlement issues – jobs, housing, food, poverty- that affect one individual impact all other family members, thus revealing the interconnected and entangled nature of settlement challenges. Problems are collectively resolved.

Settlement Challenges by Generational Cohorts

Basic Challenges: securing housing, schooling/employment, accessing health care, navigating systems, including settlement services, obtaining language training, establishing friendships and community ties, becoming culturally confident, and politically and socially involved

Age Cohorts: different ages face some similar but mostly distinct settlement challenges and families and communities play different roles for each age group

- for all age groups, racial and cultural discrimination, poor job matches leading to underemployment and unemployment, residential segregation, lack of accessibility to education, and inadequate food and housing result in high levels of newcomer poverty and persistent economic insecurity

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How do family and community relations of youth, adults and seniors facilitate or hinder their settlement?

- Are these family and community relations viewed as supportive or stressful?

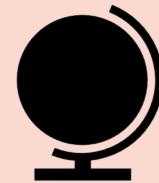
- What do these relations tell us about resilience and settlement?

Data and Methods



- A total of 73 in-depth interviews were conducted with South Asians and Chinese youth, adults, and seniors from May 2019 to May 2020

- 34 South Asian participants came from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka
- 39 Chinese participants came from Mainland China and Hong Kong



FINDINGS

THREE TYPES of SUPPORTS

- Emotional
- Financial
- Instrumental



EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

*"When you live very close by [to family members]...you also get a help...Your family is there to support, to look after your kids and everybody and the mental supports."
(Farhan, Bangladesh, 40, arrived 2017)*

- **TYPES OF FAMILY EMOTIONAL SUPPORT:**
 - Provide companionship and a sense of belonging
 - Offer advice, encouragement and reassurance
 - Validate feelings and alleviate fears and concerns
- **Impact of Emotional Support:**
 - Provides reliable and consistent bonds
 - Develop emotional resilience to overcome **current** and **future challenges**
- Family members are not the only source of emotional support:
 - Youth turn to peers
 - Adults develop networks at work
 - Seniors rely on faith and community groups

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

“I don't have an income. So, whatever my son pays for, that's what we have...He tells me that 'Baba [meaning 'Dad' in Hindi], 'Okay..that's what you need. I'll get it'. If he doesn't, that's okay.” (Abeer, India, 80, arrived in 2013)

- **TYPES OF FAMILY FINANCIAL SUPPORT:**

- Provide economic resources for basic needs (e.g. tuition fees, rent/housing needs, groceries)
- Pool resources to ensure financial sufficiency
- Take turns earning money/employment/schooling

- **Impact of Financial Support:**

- Provide essential material needs (e.g. housing, food)
- Alleviate financial stress (e.g. unemployment, precarious work, financial emergency)
- Provide a sense of safety and security

INSTRUMENTAL SUPPORT

“When I arrived, I lived with my aunt, so basically everything was taken care of by her. She was able to help with whatever I needed so I didn't have to worry about anything...For example, how to pay my tuition, how to write a cheque, how to handle and understand different documents, how to use the bank, how to handle everyday tasks...I basically didn't know how anything worked here (in Canada), so she had to teach me everything.” (Mandy, China, 21, arrived in 2015)

- **TYPES OF INSTRUMENTAL SUPPORT:**

- System navigation (e.g. essential information about life in Canada)
- Problem-solving
- Practical tasks:
 - accompanying to doctor's appointments
 - filling-out important documents
 - child care
 - elder care
 - solving technical problems
 - house chores (e.g. cooking)

- **IMPACT OF INSTRUMENTAL SUPPORT:**

- Learn essential information about life in Canada (e.g. schools, employment opportunities, community)
- Distribute household chores and care work responsibilities
- Learn skills and strategies for navigating and adjusting life in Canada

FAMILY AS A SOURCE OF STRESS

“Shan: Lots of pressure. Well, not exactly pressure, but lots of negative impact and energy.

Interviewer: Compared to before, are you having more arguments?

Shan: Yes, we would. Also, it may not necessarily be the direct impact from the stresses of immigration, but it is the end result of all the factors coming together. So it may not be related to immigration, but because of having children and that added responsibility, like perhaps the kids want to play and you're really tired, you might get frustrated easier.” (Shan, Hong Kong, 43, arrived 2004)

- **EMOTIONAL STRESS:**

- Generational conflict
- Lack of communication (e.g. language barrier between grandchildren and grandparents)
- Feeling misunderstood (e.g. parent-child conflict)

- **FINANCIAL STRESS:**

- Financial codependence (e.g. grandparents solely relying on their adult children)
- Financial pressure (e.g. obligation to support other family members through remittances)
- Limited employment opportunities

- **INSTRUMENTAL STRESS:**

- “Second shift” at home
- Inadequate and inaccurate source of information

CONCLUSION

Migration and Settlement is a Collective Process

Collective view of settlement = collective view of resilience

- Migrant resilience refers to both individual skills and strategies individuals use to manage settlement challenges and to the institutional and family/community supports and services helping newcomers to integrate
- Immigrants succeed when the social world around them provides them with the resources to do well, such as supportive neighbourhoods, work environments, friends, family, faith groups, and strong institutional ties

Where do families and communities fit into this collective view of resilience and settlement?

- **Settled immigrants are supported Immigrants: enmeshed in a web of family and community relations**
 - Similarities found in both Chinese and South Asian age cohort suggests that migration literature may have underestimated the significance of age in settlement and underplayed the role of families and communities in helping age cohorts address integration issues
- **Family and community relations are both supportive and stressful financially, emotionally, and instrumentally**