Chapter 8

Service Providers’ Perspectives on the Pathways of Adjustment for Newcomer Children and Youth in Canada

Susan S. Chuang, Sarah Rasmi, and Christopher Friesen

Over the past several decades, the demographic population of Canada has significantly transformed. Most striking is the influx of recent immigrant families into Canada, which currently hosts the second highest population of immigrants and refugees in the world. Almost one of every five Canadians is an immigrant, with 36% (390,800) representing immigrant and refugee children and youth 24 years of age or under. It has been estimated that by 2017, visible ethnic minorities will account for up to 23% of Canada’s population (Statistics Canada, 2006). As the young population lead the way for a “new” Canada, it is imperative for researchers, service providers, and social policymakers to investigate and overcome the multiple challenges and barriers that newcomer children and youth face as they navigate through their adjustment and settlement pathways.

As children and youth recreate their lives in a new country, they undergo an acculturation process that entails them to adjust behaviorally, psychologically, and socially into the mainstream society (see Berry and Sabetier, in volume). Although the migratory process is bounded by the complexities of pre- and post-settlement and adjustment factors, there are some shared challenges and barriers. First, the experience of migration leads to significant life changes to one’s physical and sociocultural environments as well as interpersonal relationships (Anisef, 2005). Many newcomers will struggle with the official language of the host country. For example, in 2001, 46% of all immigrants reported that they could not speak either English or French. Those under 15 years of age were the least likely to
understand English or French when they came to Canada (Service Canada, 2005). As some have reported, the challenging migration process has led to lasting negative effects such as newcomers becoming more fearful of the future, loneliness, alienation, school difficulties, sense of inferiority (Isralowitz and Slomin-Nevo, 2002), and other mental and physical health problems (see Anisef).

These acculturative challenges intersect with the developmental issues that children and youth face. For instance, adolescence strive for greater autonomy and independence from their parents (Erikson, 1968). In addition, friendships (peer relations) become of greater importance to their psychological and emotional well-being (see Chan and Birman, 2009, for review). To date, few have investigated the immigration challenges of younger children, with more attention to adolescent development (e.g., Chuang and Gielen, 2009; Chuang and Tamis-LeMonda, 2009). To address these issues, the present study explores the immigration challenges and barriers faced by both children and youth (up to 18 years of age). Comparative work of children and youth will elucidate the unique developmental needs and challenges of each group, providing greater insight for service providers to develop age-appropriate and culturally sensitive services and programs.

ADVANCES ON CANADA’S IMMIGRATION POLICIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

With the tremendous transformation of Canada’s ethnoprofile landscape, the ethnic, racial, linguistic, and religious diversity have guided Canada to develop a national multiculturalism policy. This multiculturalism policy was officially declared in 1971 and acknowledged that diversity is fundamental to Canada’s identity. According to the revised Canadian Multiculturalism Act (1988), the first policy objective for Canada was to “recognize and promote the understanding that multiculturalism reflects the cultural and racial diversity of Canadian society and acknowledges the freedom of all members of Canadian society to preserve, enhance and share their cultural heritage” (Department of Canadian Heritage, 2006). Canada’s operationalization of the multiculturalism policy has been and continues to be extensive and comprehensive at both the federal and provincial levels in regards to the funding that supports numerous services and programs specifically targeted to newcomers. Specifically, there are currently close to 450 immigrant-serving agencies (ISAs), largely community-based not-for-profit organizations across Canada, that have increasingly stepped forward to support
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immigrants. Numerous community organizations also provide services and programs for their local immigrant families. For example, the Community Connection (formerly known as the Host Program) is a federally funded program that recruits native Canadians to volunteer to become one-on-one host volunteers for immigrant families. These volunteers provide invaluable social and instrumental support (usually 4–6 hours per week over 6 months) (e.g., practice speaking the local official language, answer questions, provide orientation of the local community organizations) and become a part of the newcomers’ social network (for details, see Anisef, 2005). Other examples of programs include free language training for children, youth, and adults that are implemented in local schools (English as an Additional Language), community colleges, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (settlement and family-based organizations) (see Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2006, for details).

Over the past 15 years, the trend of greater attention from adult-oriented services to at risk children and youth populations has increased. This significant focus on the younger immigrant population is reflective in the new Canadian Immigration Act, Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA), which was passed in 2001. Numerous school-based and community services and programs have been developed and implemented for new immigrant and refugee children and youth throughout Canada, illustrating the complexities and challenges of migration. As immigrant-serving agencies (ISAs) are typically the first contact point for newcomers, it is important to explore how ISAs interpret the challenges and issues that young newcomers face. Thus, ISAs have a unique perspective of elucidating the challenges, barriers, and issues that young immigrants experience in their first several years in Canada. Thus, this study was developed to examine ISAs’ and community-based organizations’ perspective and response to the diverse needs of this particular population. Specifically, the primary objectives of this study was to explore the adjustment and settlement challenges and barriers. In addition, we examine age differences (children versus youth) and how children’s developmental challenges intersect with their patterns of immigration.

METHOD

Participants

A total of 40 individuals (primarily front-line staff who directly assist children and youth, program managers, and senior management) from 24 organizations
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across all ten provinces participated in this study. There were 18 immigrant serving agencies (ISAs) and six non-settlement, community-based organizations (CBOs) (e.g., Boys and Girls Club, YMCA).

Interview

Telephone interviews consisted of in-depth, semi-structured interviews, lasting approximately 60 to 90 minutes. The questions were developed in consultation with Citizenship and Immigration Canada (federal government). The questions that were posed were: (1) What challenges and issues do children face (3 to 10 years of age)?; and (2) What challenges and issues do youth face (11 to 18 years of age)? Most interviews were conducted individually, with some organizations opting for a group interview. Notes were taken and sent back to the interviewees to check for accuracy and additional comments.

Coding System

The first author conducted all of the interviews. The interviews were transcribed, and a thematic analysis was used to identify the significant challenges and barriers reported by the participants. Two graduate students were trained to code the interview responses. As some organizations had several participants, the responses were combined to represent one organization as not to overrepresent any one organization (e.g., if two interviewees from the same organization mentioned the same issue, the issue counted only once). Based on the interview responses, major themes were identified. As many of the responses were multidimensional, the primary theme was coded. For example, in many cases, language barriers were inherent to the challenge of making friends. However, the primary theme in this instance would be making friends.

The coding analyses resulted in 11 themes: (1) accessing programs; (2) Canadian culture; (3) negative/antisocial behaviors; (4) financial issues; (5) language acquisition and learning; (6) mental health; (7) parent-child relationships; (8) parent separation; (9) peer relations and friendships; (10) discrimination and racism; and (11) school challenges and barriers (see Table 8.1 for definitions). For ease of presentation, some themes such as financial issues and accessing programs were discussed together. Moreover, the responses were aggregated by topics rather than by province or by type of sector (ISA, CBO). However, the detailed responses have been placed in Table 8.2 by province and by type of sector, divided into five regions: (1) British Columbia; (2) Prairie Region (Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba); (3) Ontario; (4) Québec; and (5) Atlantic Canada Region
Table 8.1. Coding System for Challenges and Issues Faced by Immigrant and Refugee Children and Youth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accessing programs</td>
<td>Lack of ability to access programs, due to funding or transportation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canadian culture</td>
<td>General issues about Canadian culture, customs, and climate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discrimination/Racism</td>
<td>Racial or discriminatory behavior toward children/youth, from peers, teachers, and other individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finances</td>
<td>Issues that are related to finances, employment, or careers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Proficiency</td>
<td>General communication issues, assessments, language disorders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health</td>
<td>Mental health issues that are related to past trauma and stress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative behaviors</td>
<td>Behaviors that are linked to delinquency and deviancy, negative peer pressure, gang-related issues, aggression, and bullying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent-child</td>
<td>Conflicts, discipline and abuse, language brokering, and role reversal relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent separation</td>
<td>Issues surrounding difficulties of children separating from parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psycho-social/Peer</td>
<td>Psychological (e.g., self-esteem, identity) and social (e.g., fitting in, sense of belonging) issues relating to loneliness and lack of friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relationships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School issues</td>
<td>Student-related: Cultural disconnect - verbal and nonverbal misunderstandings/misinterpretations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parent involvement: disconnect or lack of parental knowledge about school issues, culture, lack of involvement such as assisting with homework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School cultural barriers: curriculum, rules, regulations, settings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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(NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR, NEW BRUNSWICK, NOVA SCOTIA, AND PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Adjustment Challenges for Children and Youth

As immigrant and refugee children and youth (IRCY) settled in Canada, they faced many challenges in all aspects of their lives, including family, school, and the broader community (see Table 8.2). The adjustment challenges were complex and multifaceted. Thus, we attempted to tease out the overarching theme of the challenge. There were four primary challenges (capturing about one-half to two-thirds of the responses) that were similar for both age groups, including: (1) language acquisition and learning; (2) psycho-social and peer relationship issues; (3) school-related issues; and (4) financial issues. The other challenges which were more age-related will follow.
Table 8.2. Service Providers' Perspective on Immigrant and Refugee Children's and Youth's Challenges and Issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Atlantic</th>
<th>B.C.</th>
<th>Ontario</th>
<th>Prairies</th>
<th>Québec</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>C</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sample</td>
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<td>6°</td>
<td>5°</td>
<td>5°</td>
<td>5°</td>
<td>4°</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Proficiency</td>
<td>5°</td>
<td>4°</td>
<td>2°</td>
<td>4°</td>
<td>4°</td>
<td>1°</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psycho-Social/Peers</td>
<td>4°</td>
<td>5°</td>
<td>4°</td>
<td>5°</td>
<td>1°</td>
<td>3°</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>4°</td>
<td>1°</td>
<td>4°</td>
<td>3°</td>
<td>2°</td>
<td>3°</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessing Programs</td>
<td>4°</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>2°</td>
<td>1°</td>
<td>3°</td>
<td>3°</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canadian Culture</td>
<td>2°</td>
<td>1°</td>
<td>2°</td>
<td>2°</td>
<td>2°</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finances</td>
<td>2°</td>
<td>3°</td>
<td>3°</td>
<td>2°</td>
<td>1°</td>
<td>1°</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent-Child Relationships</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>2°</td>
<td>3°</td>
<td>1°</td>
<td>1°</td>
<td>2°</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Behaviors</td>
<td>1°</td>
<td>3°</td>
<td>2°</td>
<td>1°</td>
<td>1°</td>
<td>1°</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health</td>
<td>2°</td>
<td>1°</td>
<td>1°</td>
<td>1°</td>
<td>1°</td>
<td>3°</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Separation</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1°</td>
<td>1°</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>3°</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Discipline</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1°</td>
<td>2°</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discrimination/Racism</td>
<td>1°</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1°</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1°</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note: B.C. = British Columbia; C = Child; Y = Youth; superscript numbers represent the number of community-based organizations that endorsed the response.
Language Acquisition and Proficiency

Many families who immigrate to Canada face language barriers. As a primary struggle, many IRCY had significant difficulties in communicating with others, expressing their own intentions, and understanding their social world. Fifteen service provider organizations (SPOs), including 10 immigrant serving agencies (ISAs) and 5 community-based organizations (CBOs), viewed this challenge as the top struggle for IRCY (see Table 8.2). As researchers have reported, language, to a large extent, mediates one’s psychological processes and social interactions (Kilbride, Anisef, Baichman-Anisef, and Khattar, 2010; Wertsch, Del Rio, and Alvarez, 2002). During our interviews service providers discussed how many of their young clients struggled to verbally express themselves to their classmates and teachers. Their inability to effectively communicate led to frustration, and in turn, to a psychological “shut down.” More specifically, newcomers’ limited second-language knowledge resulted in confusion, anxiety, fear, and withdrawal of their social environment (Kilbride et al.). In contrast, the more competent the newcomer was at mastering the host language (English or French in Canada), the quicker they were at communicating with their peers and adults (e.g., teachers), which, in turn, resulted in less acculturative adjustment problems (Lee and Chen, 2000).

Service providers also stressed the complexities of language and how the lack of language proficiency may have masked other serious issues such as learning or physical disabilities. With increased numbers of immigrant and refugee families migrating to Canada, and Canada’s shift of the national humanitarian refugee resettlement program toward refugee protection, healthy newcomer development has become more of a concern. Thus, it is important for service providers and social policy makers to develop effective and efficient strategies to assess IRCY’s language and learning abilities and potential health impairments.

The inability to communicate has also led to additional negative consequences for refugees. Many SPOs discussed how refugee boys’ inability to communicate to their peers and teachers resulted in aggressive behaviors. For example, their experience with war and the brutality of refugee camps led some boys to develop a number of survival behaviors such as hoarding or taking something without explicit permission. Although necessary in their previous environment, these types of behaviors were misinterpreted as delinquency (stealing), although their intentions or motivations stemmed from previously formed survival strategies. According to SPOs, the discrepancies of cultural/life customs and behaviors between native and host countries have led to negative psychological and social development.
Developing Peer Relationships and Friendships

Successful adaptations among immigrant students are linked to the quality of peer relationships in their social worlds, including school settings (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001). Peers and friends serve multiple purposes for IRCY. As seen in Table 8.2, many respondents (10 ISAs and 4 CBOs for children; 15 ISAs, 3 CBOs for youth) emphasized the link between social relationships and mental health, stating that IRCY had difficulties in “fitting in”, feeling a sense of belonging, thus experiencing emotional strains. These findings are supportive of past studies (which have primarily focused on youth). For example, close friendships with peers have been positively associated with self-esteem (Cauce, 1986; Keefe and Berndt, 1996) and negatively associated with depression (Aseltime, Gore, and Colten, 1994). Kilbride and colleagues (2010) reported that “fitting in” constitutes a significant amount of immigrants’ stress as they attempted to re-establish their social networks. Specifically, social support has been found to provide a variety of protective functions for newcomers, including giving newcomers a sense of belonging, emotional support, tangible assistance and information, cognitive guidance, and positive feedback (Sarason, Sarason, and Pierce, 1990; Wills, 1985).

Peers also are integral to the academic adaptation of students in general, and immigrant students in particular (e.g., Levitt, Guacci-Franco, and Levitt, 1994; Wentzel, 1999). For example, researchers have found that peer relations in school played a crucial role in promoting newcomer students’ socially competent behavior in the classroom and fostered academic engagement and achievement (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris, 2004; Furrer and Skinner, 2003).

School Challenges and Barriers

School and academic performance was viewed as the second greatest challenge for immigrant students (for children, 11 ISAs, 3 CBOs; for youth, 8 ISAs, 2 CBOs) (see Table 8.2). This was expected as language barriers have also been linked to academic achievement and performance (Ruiz-de-Velasco, Fix, and Clewell, 2001), as well as the newcomers’ ability to detect the important social nuances in the school setting (Muñoz-Sandoval, Cummins, Alvarado, and Ruef, 1998). Although verbal proficiency can be developed within a couple of years, some researchers have estimated that the level of language skills necessary to be competitive with their native-born peers in the classroom may require as much as 5 to 7 years of language experience (Collier, 1992; Leventhal, Xue, and Brooks-Gunn, 2006). Thus, it is not surprising that many newcomers faced these types of challenges in school.
As expected, school stressors included the immigrants’ adjustment to a new school environment (both physical space and social climate) and their abilities to understand aspects of the school system such as grading, regulations, and school norms. Recent studies have consistently found that even though immigrant youth may have more positive attitudes toward their schools (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco, 1995), higher academic aspirations (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001), and higher optimism about their future (Kao and Tienda, 1995; Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco, 2001) than their native-born peers, many were not as academically successful, as indicated by their achievement tests, grades, and college attendance (Gándara, 1994; Orfield, 2002; Ruiz-de-Velasco et al., 2001). Service providers discussed several reasons for these academic struggles. First, academic achievement was complicated by newcomers’ school experiences, or lack thereof. This was especially the case for refugee children and youth who may have had limited or no school experience (e.g., living in war-torn camps). Their placement in a typical Canadian classroom was an unfamiliar experience. Compounding the complexities of their learning experiences, their academic placement was determined by their developmental age, not their appropriate grade level. Second, their limited understanding of the local school culture also hindered immigrants’ adjustment to the school system. Although a portion of immigrant children were from countries where their previous school’s culture, social norms, and behaviors were similar, others may have had little or very divergent school experiences. For example, one service provider discussed how a child was ridiculed by her classmates because she would stand up when the teacher entered the room, as per classroom etiquette in her home country.

These academic challenges are consistent with past findings. For example, Anisef and Bunch (1994) reported that visible minority youth faced challenges of coping with the school system. Specifically, they found that these students performed poorly in class, suffered from behavioral problems, or dropped out of school. These negative outcomes were linked to school policies, discriminatory attitudes of teachers, and a lack of support and encouragement for academic achievement among minority youth. These types of environment negatively impacted newcomer students, resulting in truancy, fostering feelings of hostility toward school, and increased delinquency.

Another school challenge focused on newcomer parents’ involvement in their children’s schooling. As Moreno and Chuang (in volume) discussed (also see Moreno, Lewis-Menchaca, and Rodríguez, in press), how parents and teachers conceptualized parent involvement and who was responsible for their children’s academic learning may have added to IRCY’s acculturation challenges. According to service providers, many parents believed in a clear
division between home and school. For example, many immigrant parents viewed the school as having the primary responsibility of educating their children. They viewed teachers as the experts; thus, questioning teachers or interfering with school activities was seen as disrespectful. Unfortunately, this was perceived by some teachers as a “lack of care.” Other school-family disconnects have been demonstrated in IRCY families’ understanding of the school culture. As one SPO illustrated, in some countries such as China, students were expected to be respectful of teachers, obedient, and quiet, and thus, parents trained and socialized their children in line with their cultural expectations. However, Canadian teachers often expected their students to be assertive, vocal, and ask questions. This cultural disconnect between parents and teachers of student expectations and behaviors ultimately limit their children’s academic advancement and standing in the classrooms.

Adding to the complexities of families and schools, many newcomer families have migrated to Canada with limited financial income. According to Statistics Canada (2008), recent immigrants are more likely than their Canadian-born counterparts to be of low income, especially visible minority newcomers. More specifically, the poverty rate for recent immigrants (in Canada for 10 years or less) was significantly higher (52%) than the national average (25%). As some have found, socioeconomic status has been linked with children’s academic performance. Low-income households were less likely to: (1) be able to afford materials to support learning (e.g., computers, internet access); (2) provide a conducive learning environment for their children (e.g., space for children to do their homework); (3) provide nutritional foods; and (4) assist their children with their homework, as parents may not have the relevant educational background for the tasks at hand. These issues, combined with institutional barriers, were found to impact children’s self-esteem and motivation to academically succeed (Ansief and Bunch, 1994).

**Finances and Accessing Programs**

According to Statistics Canada (2004), newcomer families are more likely to have higher rates of low income and poverty than other Canadians. Service providers discussed the multidimensionality of financial strain on families and, more specifically, on children and youth (9 ISAs, 1 CBO for children; 10 ISAs for youth) (see Table 8.2). Researchers have revealed that positive employment experiences were associated with healthy social and economic development of newcomer youth (Johnson and Peters, 1994). However, SPOs stated that many of their youth were facing difficulties in finding employment, with some finding other avenues of support that may be illegal (e.g., being runners for drug dealers) as employment opportunities are often limited by prejudice (Kilbride...
et al., 2010). Thus, newcomers are placed in precarious situations where financial needs are great but funds are limited. Some youth also take on some of the financial burdens of the family. Such burdens increase the acculturative stress for youth, which may force some youth to drop out of school.

Finances have also been linked to children’s psychological well-being. When children, and especially youth, want to “fit in” with their peers, they feel the pressures of dressing like them and joining them in activities (which may include cost for transportation, the activity itself) that, more likely than not, require money for unbudgeted expenses. SPOs noted that some parents were unaware of how certain merchandise (e.g., wearing trendy clothing) were their children’s ways of “fitting in” socially and gaining social acceptance with their peers. Meanwhile, children and youth may not fully understand the degree to which their parents were struggling to make ends meet. Thus, parent-child tension arose between children’s desire for social activities and the latest fashion and parents’ view of these as unnecessary expenses.

Limited funding also has serious consequences to the degree to which children and youth can transition into their new social environment. First, some service providers discussed how many families (especially families of younger children) had issues with affording fee-based programs. Unfortunately, these cost-prohibitive programs may have assisted children and youth in overcoming some of their adjustment challenges (e.g., academic assistance, social activities that may increase opportunities for newcomers to make friends). However, even if programs and services were free, other barriers such as transportation were also identified as a serious concern. For example, affordable housing was generally located further from the city (where many of the organizations and agencies are located). With the limited financial resources for housing, affordable housing was generally located further from the city (where many of the organizations and agencies are located). Subsequently, the cost of transportation restricted families from taking advantage of the various services and programs offered to all newcomers.

Lastly, these economic stresses and hardships in families were linked to emotional distress, marital relations, and parenting practices (for review, see Conger and Donnellan, 2007). For example, Mistry, Benner, Tan, and Kim (2009) reported that Chinese American youth’s perceptions of their families’ economic stress and constraints predicted their levels of emotional distress and educational success.

**Shifts within the Parent-Child Relationship**

Research has revealed that children tend to acquire a new language and aspects of the settlement society’s culture more readily and quickly than do
their parents (Gonzales, Knight, Morgan-Lopez, Saenz, and Sirolli, 2002). Participants indicated that discrepancies in intergenerational adaptation to a new culture had been found to negatively impact parent-child relations (10 SPOs for youth; 6 SPOS for children). Thus, as families cope with, and adapt to, the significant sociocultural lifestyle and environmental changes, many immigrant parents tend to rely on their children to help them function effectively in the new society (Santisteban, Muir-Malcolm, Mitrani, and Szapocznik, 2002). Consequently, children and youth adopt an increased level of responsibility and may even need to assume some adult roles in their families (see Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco, 2001). For example, children often become the intermediaries or “brokers” between the two cultural and linguistic worlds, assisting their parents by translating and interpreting, often in complex situations (Tse, 1995a). Language and cultural brokering positions children in very influential roles in the families, and these roles may or may not be developmentally appropriate (Tse, 1995b). Many have found that such role reversals had negative consequences on children and youth, including emotional and somatic problems (e.g., Johnson, 1990) and psychological problems such as anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and the like (e.g., Oznobishin and Kurman, 2009; Parke and Chuang, in volume).

SPOs also revealed that IRCY’s need for independence was a common challenge between children and their parents. Independence or personal freedom (the ability to have personal preferences and choices) has been viewed as a necessary aspect for one’s psychological well-being and for the formation of a child’s social self (Nucci and Lee, 1993). Especially among older children, youth may expect higher levels of independence and less parental control (Fuligni, 1998; Yau and Smetana, 2003), leading to more parent-adolescent conflicts (e.g., see Kwak, 2003; Smokowski, Rose, and Bacallao, 2008; Tardif and Geva, 2006). This issue was particularly salient for newcomer families, as service providers discussed how parents were very concerned for their children’s and youth’s well-being. Specifically, parents endeavored to protect their children from negative influences, but youth viewed this level of control as inappropriate. This struggle with control has led some parents to blame the “individualistic/Westernized” culture of Canada for the difficulty with their children, claiming that Canadian parents are permissive and provide their children with too much freedom.

The discrepancies of acculturation levels between parents and their children may lead to increased conflicts. The extant literature suggests that parent-youth conflict is related to a number of important psychological, academic, behavioral, and familial outcomes, including psychological symptoms and depression (Dennis, Basanez, and Farahman, 2010; Lim, Yeh, Liang, Lau, and McCabe, 2009), emotional distress (Chung, Flook, and Fuligni,
academic achievement (Dotterer, Hoffman, and Updegraff, 2008), delinquency (van Doorn, Branje, and Meeus, 2008), and family satisfaction (Lee, Su, and Yoshida, 2005). These findings stress the importance for researchers to better understand the complexities of parent-child relationships in immigrant families and for SPOs to develop and modify current services and programs to address these issues.

**Immigrants’ Aggressive and Negative Behaviors**

A fairly unexplored area of research is the negative behaviors and delinquency conducted by newcomer children and youth. There has been some attention to the negative outcomes of immigrants who struggle academically and the impact of perceived discrimination and racism and how newcomers have been victimized. However, little attention has focused on how newcomers engage in aggressive and/or delinquent behaviors and activities (see García Coll and Magnuson, 1997; Massey and Denton, 1993). As illustrated by service providers, whether intentional or unintentional, negative and anti-social behaviors by some newcomers have increased their difficulties in adjusting into their new social environment (10 SPOs for youth; 4 ISAs for children) (see Table 8.2). For example, confounded by the challenges and struggles of learning a new language, fitting in, making friends, and financial needs, some newcomer children and youth become enticed into joining gangs. As some SPOs witnessed, gang members tend to “hang around” settlement agencies, hoping to meet vulnerable immigrants and refugees that may be willing to engage in illegal activities to make some money.

Currently, no research has explicitly explored how immigrants’ lives and social skills developed in the home country impacted children’s level of adjustment and settlement in the host country. This focus of research is particularly important for groups such as refugees from war-torn or hostile areas. As illustrated by the respondents of the present study, although their modes of adaptation may have been essential to survive in camps (where food and resources were scarce), their behaviors conflicted with the values and practices of the host country. Unfortunately, refugee children may be unaware that their survival and social skills are incompatible with their new social world and “learn the hard way.” Teachers and peers may misinterpret these behaviors, leading them to experience greater negative school and social experiences. According the participants, difficulties were compounded by the fact that many refugees arrive to Canada with post-traumatic stress disorders following exposure to violence and great hardship. However, the mental health services may be either unavailable or limited and thus, their challenges of adapting to Canada are much more complex.
Discrimination and Racism

Researchers have consistently reported that discrimination and racism have deleterious effects on one’s psychological and physical development. More specifically, experiences of prejudice and discrimination have led to lower self-esteem and other psychological functioning (e.g., anxiety, elevated stress, depression) (Dubois, Burk-Braxton, Swenson, Tevendale, Lockerd, and Moran, 2002; Surko, Ciro, Blackwood, Nembhard, and Peake, 2005) as well as physical health issues and behavioral problems (Williams, Neighbors, and Jackson, 2003). Unfortunately, some service providers had young clients facing these challenges and barriers as they adjusted into their new schools and communities (1 SPO for children, 5 SPOs for youth). IRCY described to service providers a variety of incidences of why they were discriminated against, including language barriers, clothing, color of their skin, the food they ate, and so on. Discrimination took on many forms, including group exclusion at school, lack of friends, teasing, and bullying. An expected consequence is that many IRCY felt alienated, depressed, and isolated.

Other Challenges

Especially for children, a significant portion of ISAs (10 and 6 ISAs, respectively) mentioned that newcomers had considerable difficulties in understanding and adjusting to the Canadian culture (e.g., social norms, food) and weather (i.e., winter). First, some informants mentioned that IRCY had adjustment issues in the Canadian’s multicultural society where they were interacting with other ethnic minority groups for the first time. Thus, “being Canadian” was an elusive meaning, creating additional pressures on IRCY to “fit in” with their diverse peer groups. SPOs reported that even the Canadian weather, and more specifically, the winter, provided a significant challenge, as newcomers may not have been fully prepared for the harshness of the Canadian weather and the additional cost that would be incurred.

Seven SPOs (5 ISAs, 2 CBOs) discussed mental health challenges for children, whereas three ISAs mentioned these types of issues for youth. There was a particular focus on refugee children and youth and their past experiences in refugee camps. Participants reported that many refugees witnessed and/or experienced traumatizing violent crimes (e.g., family members being killed in front of them). With limited resources and infrastructure of schools and community agencies, some children and youth had difficulties in adapting into their new lives. Some suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder that remained undiagnosed and untreated. Unfortunately, these challenges then impacted their lives in various ways, such as their abilities to concentrate
in school (leading to lower academic achievement) to socially interacting with their peers (leading to higher levels of loneliness, anxiety, depression, and decreased sense of belongingness).

Parent-child separation was also mentioned as a challenge for newcomer children and youth (3 ISAs, 2 CBOs for children; 1 ISA for youth). Others found that children struggled with separation anxiety from their parents in day care/school. Parental discipline was also mentioned by a few SPOs, especially in relation to physical punishment. As some cultures condone the use of corporal punishment, some parents may not initially realize that physically disciplining one’s child was illegal in Canada. Thus, some parents felt that they were unable to “control and discipline” their children and youth (4 ISAs for children; 1 ISA, 1 CBO for youth).

CONCLUSIONS

Especially in Canada, where significant efforts of the federal and provincial governments have supported over 450 immigrant serving agencies and other community-based organizations to provide services and programs for newcomer families, it is important for us to tap into the perspectives of service providers. This study provides insight into the various challenges that service providers have indicated as serious issues for newcomer children and youth. Although immigrant families have remarkable strengths and resources (family ties, high educational aspirations, and optimism about the future), many struggle as they navigate the terrain of the new country. They encounter formidable barriers such as language, discrimination and racism, and changes in family dynamics and relationships, and must re-construct their social world (e.g., Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco, 2001). The situation is exacerbated when children and youth contemplate that the decision to migrate to a new country was not theirs (see Levitt, Lane, and Levitt, 2005).

Immigrant-serving agencies as well as non-settlement, community-based organizations have attempted to provide effective programs and services that are instrumental in young immigrants’ adjustment into Canada. Through their experiences, service providers afford us with unique insights into the lives of immigrants. There are myriad of challenges and barriers that immigrant and refugee children and youth face, with some challenges being more complex than others. Although it is necessary to translate and provide information to families about institutions, local practices, and even the Canadian weather, it is not sufficient to permeate the deeper aspect of one’s life (e.g., school, friends). Problems such as discrimination, poverty, and violence complicate the acculturation process, taxing even the most resilient immigrants’ coping capacities.
However, SPOs can be instrumental in developing protective factors. When students believed that they are competent and have some level of control, they are likely to engage in learning a new language and forge new interpersonal relationships (National Research Council, 2004; Schunk, 1991).

Although greater attention has focused on the adjustment of newcomers, we need to be more proactive in developing early intervention settlement programs and services that will provide newcomer children and youth with enhanced skills, tools, and opportunities to successfully transition into Canada. To accomplish this, we must build collaborative efforts with various stakeholders (academics, service providers, policy makers) to move toward a more systematic and effective research and action agenda in dealing with the challenges and barriers of immigration and settlement that not only children and youth face but their families’ as well.

AUTHOR NOTE

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REFERENCES


**APPENDIX A**

**Organization Contributors**

**British Columbia**

1. Boys and Girls Club of Greater Vancouver*
2. Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria
3. Immigrant Services Society of BC
4. MOSAIC
5. SUCCESS

**Prairie Region**

Alberta

1. Edmonton Immigrant Services
2. Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers

Manitoba

1. IRCOM HOUSE
2. Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council, Inc
3. NEEDS CENTRE

Saskatchewan

1. Regina Open Door Society
2. Saskatoon Open Door Society

**Ontario**

1. Advisory and Support Services
2. New Canadians’ Centre of Excellence Inc.
3. Peel Children’s Aid Society*
4. Region of Peel*
5. Settlement & Integration Services Organization (SISO)

**Québec**

1. PROMIS
Chapter 8

Atlantic Canada Region

New Brunswick
1. Multicultural Association of the Greater Moncton Area

Newfoundland
1. Association for New Canadians
2. Daybreak Parent Child Centre*

Nova Scotia
1. YMCA*
2. Metropolitan Immigrant Settlement Association (MISA)

Prince Edward Island
1. PEI Association for Newcomers to Canada

* Denotes non-immigrant settlement community-based organizations