

Athabasca University  Master of Arts - Integrated Studies

SERVICES AND SUPPORT FOR RECENTLY IMMIGRATED WOMEN
LOOKING FOR TRAINING OR WORK IN PEEL REGION

By

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Integrated Studies Project
submitted to Dr. Paul Kellogg, April 2013

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts – Integrated Studies

Athabasca, Alberta

April, 2013

DEDICATIONS

This work is dedicated to my father, who was the most inspiring educator of all and to my mother without whom nothing is possible. My parents are a testament to the spirit of Canada's immigrant community; relentless in pursuing work and maintaining a positive spirit, so that their children could have better lives. My mother and my educator-sister have been my biggest supporters during my graduate studies. Daily calls to see how I was balancing schoolwork with paid work, home, and children, lifted me up more than you will ever know. To my best girls in Caledon, Ontario, I hope that all immigrant women make friends and mentors like you in their communities.

Thanks to Dr. Emma Pivato, for teaching me self-regulation to arrange my adult-learning environment for success. Dr. Ursule Critoph and Tara Gibb have completed an impressive body of work in this area and inspired my focus on immigrant women. Without Dr. Nanci Langford and Dr. Caroline Redl, I could not have conducted my interviews from positive positions of research/interview process and ethical sensitivity. Thanks to Dr. Ken Banks I grew keen to examine the gaps between social reform policy and the life outcomes of the communities they affect. In the background of my studies were the invaluable supports of the MAIS and REB office staff, especially those of Stacey, Janice and the almighty smiley face☺.

Enormous and heart-felt thanks my supervisor, Dr. Paul Kellogg for all his encouragement and support throughout my project. I appreciated his gentle and thoughtful guidance through the many issues and opportunities.

Finally and most important, I thank all the immigrant women and immigrant services organizations that supported this project. Your courage and willingness to share your experiences has given immigrant women a stronger voice.

ABSTRACT

This is a research report from eleven (11) interviews conducted between an immigrant minority researcher and immigrant women/Immigrant Service Organizations (ISOs). The research goal was to fill a void in understanding the needs of recent immigrant women looking for work/training for work in Peel Region. The sample included recently immigrant women of core working age, foreign-born residents of Peel Region, who are currently looking for work/training, and ISO staff - administrative, settlement counsellors, literacy teachers, and, volunteers. Using inductive and qualitative methods, participants were guided by six (6) general questions which asked them to retell experiences with services and supports for work/training. Participants often led the research, emphasising what was most important for them to relay. Intersections between social services, economic and immigration policies, the labour market, and, newcomers were discussed. Personal positions of gender, race, domestic responsibilities, emotions, and, hopes for the future emerged. Through individual expressions of support-seeking and sharing experiences, immigrant women and ISOs provide an insider's view into how work/training supports are internalized. Results were presented underscored with the voices of immigrant women and their ISO providers. A discussion section offers implications of the research findings. Recommendations for future directions to ISOs, Peel Region, and Government organizations are provided.

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RESEARCH GOALS

This study seeks to fill a void in understanding needs of recent immigrant women looking for training or work in the Peel Region. Immigrant women and ISOs are asked to help the researcher approach their insider status to understand: (1) Goals for employment and training; (2) Supports that are most helpful in meeting those goals, and; (3) Barriers they face along the way. The research method is interdisciplinary and values the experiences and expressions of the sample at the complex and varied intersections of:

- Social services, economic and immigration policies, the labour market *and* newcomers;
- Settlement services *and* the needs of the newcomers;
- Cultural expressions of support-seeking *and* work/training goals, and;
- Women *and* their positionality in work/training.

This research will assist Peel Region, employment agencies, ISOs, federal and provincial government organizations, and potential employers, to better understand the needs of marginalized immigrants, and to make services more accessible and accountable. Insider positions will amplify the voices of immigrant women, and in so doing generate ideas for client-centered policies and program reforms.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Immigrants account for forty-nine percent (49%) of the total population of Peel Region. Sixty-five percent (65%) of the region's growth from 1996 to 2006 is attributed to immigration. The current immigration system favours immigrants with advanced educational achievement and literacy; a selection process that doesn't guarantee employment or social inclusion. Recent immigrant women have the worst labour market outcomes, particularly those immigrants with university degrees, arriving in Canada after 2000. Statistics Canada (2008) quantifies this disparity at an unemployment rate of 2.8 times that of Canadian-born women. Forty percent (40%) of recent immigrant women hold university degrees in jobs with low educational requirements, as compared with ten percent (10%) for native-born Canadian women. (Preston et al, 2010, 2010, Wayland, 2010)

Newly arrived immigrant women enter an already complex intersection of culture, globalization, immigration and race. They face unequal access to the labour market, yet their issues of access and equity are not addressed by public policy. Instead, immigrant women contend with insufficient support for settlement, a disjointed accreditation process, low returns on prior knowledge and work, and discrimination. Social problems include breakdown in marriages, facing imbalances in power and feeling isolated (Fenwick et al, 2006, Frick & Albertyn, 2011, Galarneau & Morrisette, 2008, Giles & Preston, 2004, Hum & Simpson, 2003, Man, 2011, Reitz, 2001, 2006, Wayland, 2010,)

Re-credentialing affects 74% of the immigrant population and problems in RPL (Recognition of Prior Learning) account for lost earning for immigrants of \$5.9B per

annum (Reitz, 2006). RPL is a site of struggle over the meaning and value of knowledge in the context of migration. Current RPL approaches immigrants from positions of power and assumes them to have a knowledge-deficit. RPL causes lowered economic, familial and social positions and leaves immigrant women feeling racialized and gendered. Contemporary RPL requires radical transformation into more open and flexible processes for citizenship and inclusion, wherein immigrant women applicants are established as co-determinants of their education and experience (Guo, 2010, Ng & Shan, 2010, Williams, 2007).

Integrationist models are based on the ideology that employment, income, identity, and, self-esteem are linked. Careful and specific actions to address problems faced by women immigrants must be provided *early in* the acculturation processes. Support actions include pre-training readiness, training, personal support, public awareness campaigns, and, “Propulsive Employment Action (PEA)” (Iosif, 2010, p.95). PEA supports are designed specifically to integrate immigrant women into the labour market. Through collaboration between employers, the federal and local government, employment agencies and industry associations, a mediation system is established between immigrant women and available jobs. (Bernhard et al, 2010, Li, 2008, Menard, 2011).

A system of Immigrant Service Organizations (ISOs) has been in place in Canada since the 1970s. With great insights into the needs of recent immigrants, community-based ISOs provide critical, local, and culturally relevant programs. Support services include computer classes, employment, counselling, language education, and workshops on women’s legal rights. ISOs report that provincial cutbacks to community based

literacy and work-readiness programs leave immigrants to bear the costs of settling their families, re-training, and finding work, when they are already financially strapped. ISOs lament that the Canadian government is mostly concerned with cost-cutting; as a result they are pushed to a market-driven service delivery model which services immigrants based on ability to pay, rather than need. This conflict creates an uncomfortable existence for ISO staff between advocacy for immigrant women and compliance with funders (CERIS, 2012, Cohen, 2003, COSTI, 199, 2013, Gibb & Hamdon, 2010, Green & Green, 2004, Menard, 2011)).

An insider's view of the experiences of immigrant women looking for work or training should include study of their gendered identities and positionality. No single report offers a comprehensive explanation as to the description and source of difficulties immigrant women experience, and what particular services and supports would be helpful. Support seeking behaviours of immigrant women are thought to be varied but not well understood, and poorly documented. A researcher who can approach the status of an insider, seeking to understand the marginalized position of immigrant woman in society, is thought advantageous to helping us understand her world. (Frick & Albertyn, 201, Gu, 2012, Guo, 2010, Merriam et al, 2001 Preston et al, 2010, Stewart et al, 2008, Zaman, 2008).

METHOD

Inductive and qualitative methods were used to determine the experiences of recently immigrant women, with services and supports for work/training goals. Eleven subjects were the focus of primary interviews and these included:

- *4-Educated Immigrant Women*
- *2-Settlement Counsellors (Earlier Immigrants)*
- *1-Full-time LINC (Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada) Instructor (Earlier Immigrant)*
- *1-ISO Program Administrator*
- *3-ISO Volunteers (Second Generation Immigrants)*

The immigrant women sample was limited to immigrant women of core working age who were foreign-born, residents of Peel Region, who migrated to Ontario less than five (5) years ago, and who were looking for training/work in Peel Region. Access to the sample was facilitated by ISOs who also reviewed documentation for relevancy, and clarified social, political and environmental influences. The research setting was the premises of ISOs in Peel Region. The interview process was exploratory and flexible conducted in English. Each participant was asked:

1. *What are the most important challenges faced trying to find training or work?*
2. *What are immigrant women's' goals for work or training?*
3. *How do immigrant women define and understand social support? What barriers affect support-seeking?*
4. *What services and supports are most valuable?*
5. *What services and supports are desirable to recent immigrant women but not available to them?*
6. *How do immigrant women feel about their future and what concerns them?*

The study was intended to provide an insider's understanding of what services and supports are most valuable to immigrant women seeking work or training, and to uncover experiences at key intersections of knowledge, immigration, globalization, race and culture.

ANALYSIS

Data collection was in the form of brief handwritten researcher notes taken during interviews, audio recordings of interviews, typed transcripts of interviews, and handwritten post interview notes. Interviews were recorded in their entirety with the same ipad device, using Voddio software and a Vericorder external microphone. All audio recordings were transcribed by the researcher into Microsoft word documents. Transcripts were vetted with interview participants and changes made as requested before the data was analyzed. Interview transcripts were coded for anonymity and organized into themes, established from secondary research, ISOs and the interviews. The researcher is herself is a woman, a visible minority, and an immigrant.

RESPONDENTS

Asha - six (6) years as settlement counsellor. Most immigrant outcomes found negative. Credentialing delays are six months – twenty years. Most clients accept significant underemployment at low skill, low pay jobs, and get stuck in these to make ends meet. They abandon employment strategies of seeking credential equivalency. The male spouse and breadwinner often returns to the home country to make ends meet, leaving their wives here in low income jobs with total responsibility for children and home.

Eve - four (4) years in LINC program administration. Primary responsibility for connecting immigrant women to other supports such as: employment, food bank, crisis counselling and transportation. Eve and Rosanna work closely together in a unique ISO environment where multidisciplinary supports are co-located with LINC. Problems of immigrant women known multidisciplinary; ISO understands the importance of addressing psychological barriers to work/training goals. Interventions tend to be proactive and immediate.

Harjeet - two and a half (2½) years as a settlement counsellor. An earlier immigrant. Frustrated over lacking immigrant self-advocacy and motivation. Clients struggle to achieve literacy before they are eligible for Canadian Citizenship or free funding expires; settling-in problems get in the way of attendance. Most strategic issue facing her ISO is connectivity to other service providers and knowledge about their services for immigrants.

Rosanna - LINC Instructor five (5) years. An earlier immigrant. Considered an exemplar educator in her organization based on student and co-worker feedback. Leverages the four literacy dimensions of speaking, listening, reading and writing to normalize and reframe immigrant women's encounters with discrimination and racism. Client outcomes for training/work are mostly positive.

Lee, Maya & Susan - student volunteers; currently enrolled in a social work/counselling post-secondary program. Provide a number of services to immigrant women including accompanying them on doctor and Service Canada appointments, providing translation services and teaching basic computing skills. Find community unwelcoming, rude and impatient with immigrants – particularly with literacy.

Lynn is a recent professional immigrant woman who remains underemployed. Numerous applications for work commensurate with her employment have not helped her job search except for one maternity leave placement. Survival jobs found demeaning. Experienced many encounters with racism and discrimination based on accent, color and county of origin. Her credentials are undervalued by prospective employers who convey confusion over their exchange value in Canada. May return home.

Michelle is a professional immigrant; migrated four (4) years ago. Engaged in credential equivalency successfully to meet federal immigration requirements. She has a B. Ed., and M.A. and TESL credentials and these credentials have not been recognized at

professional associations with whom registration is required to work in the province of Ontario. Has applied, interviewed and volunteered extensively, and remains underemployed. Exploring low-pay, low-skill work to make ends meet and may return to pre-migration country leaving spouse behind.

Katija – in Canada three and a half (3½) years. Educated and experienced in commercial marketing. She is tri-lingual including fluency in French and plans to find employment that leverages her languages. Enrolled in conversational English classes to improve spoken English while spouse re-credentials for work, pays off that educational debt, and to care for young children. Finds Canadians polite and understanding. Concerned that with passing time, her career is left behind and wishes she had access to funded on-line training to develop her skills now, for work later.

Rochelle - migrated 3-4 years ago. Her B.A. and B.Sc. were credentialed by University of Toronto and she was working in her profession within one month. Leads an ethno community support organization; focused on the health and well-being of immigrant women. Through extensive research and proactive outreach, established networks and connections to enable work/training goals. Coaches immigrants on retaining their rich cultural heritage, while at the same time adopting those positive aspects of the Canadian culture which would further their work/training goals. Says there is no discrimination in Canada.

RESULTS

Question 1: What are the most important challenges facing recent immigrants trying to find training or work?

Most important challenges include: expectations, delays in employment, credentialing problems, dwindling finances, taking up survival jobs for income, and abandoning training goals. Professional immigrant women expect to find work immediately but seem ill-prepared for unemployment, and underemployment. Lynn shares how she was misled by her expectations that a job was guaranteed:

“The biggest barrier I see... before they come here they are promised all these things, they have a different view of what settling in Canada is about...they have been told...as soon as you get here it’s free health care, you are going to get a job right away...if they have accurate information...they could make a more informed decision...Eve

“I thought that I could hit the Canadian job scene running...based on how excited they [CIC] were about our credentials...you expect to send out a couple of applications and that everything would be ok...Many people who are hiring they don’t understand...that we are highly qualified... that we can do a job as good and I daresay even better, than our Canadian counterparts...” Lynn

Katija’s expectations of life and work in Canada were in line with her expectation, though settling in has still proved difficult. She had friends who migrated earlier from whom she gleaned an accurate picture of what adjustments would have to be made:

“When you come to Canada, it is as if you have no career, no background, no diploma, nothing, you have to start from zero... In some ways it is very difficult... there is problem for the equivalency for the diploma and its takes time....I knew that. Katija

ISOs share the observation that long delays in re-credentialing and continuous underemployment have detrimental and immediate effects on immigrants. Michelle’s credentials were accepted by the federal government for immigration, and refused at the

provincial level for work. Four years later, she remains underemployed. Rochelle's credentials were approved and she was working in her field one (1) month after arrival:

“Getting certification...is horrible. ...people that certify degrees and diplomas are so restricted, so narrow minded...and racist... if anybody is from Asia, India, Pakistan...they don't even look at the degree, they say “oh you bought this degree... It takes months, years, sometimes decades, to get certified in their field...its poverty, living pay check to pay check, they are underemployed and the skills they came here with will be out-dated by the time they are able to sort of, break the cycle, if they break the cycle. I know this doctor...trying to get his certificate for the last 20 years...he gave up and went back home...He has a broken family now.” Asha

“ I have a B.A. and B. Sc. from India...certified by University of Toronto...I found my work right away in the same month when we arrived...we are still working in the same field...” Rochelle

“... my certificates...got them evaluated by WES [World Education Service]... [Citizenship & Immigration Canada] have said ok you have the right education to enter, why are you [College of Teachers] doubting it? ...this policy...pretty contradictory...I was going into a depression...getting desperate...if I go back I will be leaving my husband behind...we don't have kids it's just the two of us, we need each other...” Michelle

Re-credentialing is not the only form of gatekeeping encountered by the sample. Hiring managers can also denigrate and racialize new immigrants:

“When I walked into the [interview] room, I was not greeted, I was not offered a seat, and I stood there until I realized that no one was going to offer me a seat...Not even how are you? They all looked at each other and one said you go ahead. They asked questions but they were not interested in me I tell you that...my husband said you should have left...but it's a small community, I still have to be professional. I am a proud Canadian; I am not going to let anyone make me feel less about myself....I have no issues with my colour, my accent...” Lynn

Continuous attendance in training programs is a growing concern for ISOs. Not all immigrants have access to free daycare or family finances and many abandon literacy training in response to mounting financial pressure:

“We have to turn people away and they are stuck...they want to upgrade English but they can’t do that unless they have daycare and income coming into pay for that daycare. As soon as a student comes here English is the most important thing...then they realize they can’t make ends meet with English, so their next concern is that they find employment....doesn’t matter what that is...If the husband has money, those are the women who will stay in class and see it through...” Eve

Many immigrant women are forced into survival jobs to stem draining finances, pay bills and put food on the table for families. Initially intended as temporary stop gaps, survival jobs become permanent employment as family-reliance on this income increases.

Rosanna, a literacy instructor, explains that these: (a) impede language skill development; (b) sabotage full realization of employment potential, and; (c) impact eligibility for Canadian Citizenship. Attitudes towards survival jobs vary from acceptance to indignity.

Some immigrant women rationalise survival jobs based on a comparison of currencies and income between Canada and their pre-migration country. Lynn finds recalling her survival job experience extremely difficult:

“...it pains me up to now to even think about it. I went to Wal-Mart and took a job as a cashier. I said ok I need to earn some money...spend a couple of months, gain Canadian experience while I continue looking for something...I ended up spending over five years there... and I thought one day, I just got up and said what on earth am I doing here? I know I have potential, I have talents, abilities, education.” Lynn

“They get in those [jobs] for survival, and then they can’t make it to classes... I mean you can’t tell them [not] to prioritise your English education over putting food on the table for your family ...they don’t do much reading or writing at that particular entry or transitional level of jobs. They see that their learning is happening with interaction with other Canadians who are doing similar jobs ...you see the listening and speaking improving, but then to qualify themselves to jobs of their standing from their home countries... is through practice and training and coming to school. I think the way she is viewing it is that the money she made here is more that she

would make as a [profession name]...in [home country name]. So there is an amount of complacency that sets in...she doesn't care she is happy. By the time they realise they can be somewhere else it's way too late...with recent changes in citizenship requirements...they have to have a LINC level 3...speaking and listening” Rosanna

Question 2: What are immigrant women's goals for work or training?

Most respondents identified literacy, settling in families, and employment, as primary goals. Goals were relayed in a particular order and reveal women's conscious placement of goals behind other needs of the family:

*"I had a marketing diploma...I am a TESL educator... [And] I have a B.A...I worked with a government organization that lent money to small businesses...I am English-speaking... So I came here thinking that I would continue that, but that was not meant to be."
Lynn*

"My impression was that jobs were waiting to be picked up...I have an M.A....a B.Ed....taught for 13 years...at universities and colleges...I wouldn't say [settling in Peel Region] is a culture shock because I came from a community called Anglo-Indian...our native language is English and...our culture is very much the same as the USA..." Michelle

Some educated immigrant women choose to remain in their pre-migration positionality and limit their goals to literacy. Other women delay decisions to seek employment until such time as literacy is accomplished. ISOs expresses concern that by placing themselves last, women may unknowingly be giving up on their dreams. Some decisions women make about goal ordering are conscious and reflect the ideology that the spouse-breadwinner must establish his employment first:

"95% of our students are not going to work...they hold the cultural thing the man will work and they will stay home... [Other students] are not a level [of literacy] where they will find jobs...probably when they are at a LINC level 6 or 7 they will find jobs...most of them are educated, yes... they are here to make friends" Michelle

"...I feel the women, doesn't matter how educated they are, they sacrifice their future for their husband...let me improve my kids' life so that they have a better future, let me take all the burden off

him so that way he gets a better job and we are all well off...they are the ones that sacrifice their future for the betterment of their family...Asha

“So my interest when I came here was for my husband to get a job, for my son to get in college, and then for me to get a job...for a woman to go out and work and leave her husband at home, and I am talking about a husband who is accustomed to be the breadwinner, it was one of the most distressing things...There is the husband now feeling his self-esteem is going down, down, down, the woman is carrying the money and that causes a lot of problems. I took the backseat...” Lynn

Question 3: How do immigrant women define and understand social support? What barriers affect support-seeking?

Not all services are culturally appropriate to accept. With time, rapport and trust builds between ISOs and their clients, and cultural taboos towards support-seeking can be overcome:

“...it depends on the cultural background and the type of help they require...all the South Asian students I would say the Pakistani, the Bengali, the Sri Lankan...as a group are reluctant to see services like family counselling....however they would be very active in seeking help from the food bank ... few Middle Eastern students...and some Europeans...were eager to seek out help...”
Rosanna

“It takes time to build that relationship for them to open up to you or trust that whatever is said in this room stays in this room and it’s not going to be leaked and everybody in their class in their community is going to know like oh my god this person is having this issue...cultural taboos...before she was able to admit to me that she was in an abusive relationship, I had known her for about two years...”
Asha

Some newcomers lack self-efficacy. ISOs draw from their earlier positions, as new immigrants and support-seekers, to inspire more independence. Other immigrant women take everything they are told at face value. If they are turned away by a government employee at a Services Canada desk for example, or told they are not eligible for certain services by a dominant and/or misinformed spouse, they abandon support-seeking:

“I face many different clients...even [differences between] Arabic countries. Sometimes when the client comes, she wants to be depending on you...she wants you to be her worker...At the same time I explain my point...I struggle in the beginning and then after that I become stronger...”
Harjeet

“Sometimes the husband says you are not eligible for this or to the wife you can’t apply for it...and they don’t. They walk away [say] “its ok” and they don’t ask “ok can you know other places provide

services for us...do you know other organizations can help us?"
Asha

Lynn never imagined that she would need support, coming from high expectations of immediate employment. She admits that in retrospect, support-seeking might have helped her. Michelle shares that once she realized unemployment; she quickly accessed ISO supports, but found that these were not valuable:

"...perhaps an error on my part. I really did not foresee myself needing support because I thought...I remember the immigration officers saying Canada is looking for people like you [and I thought] right so they want me..."Lynn

"I registered with [ISO name] but I was not getting any support from them...[ISO staff person]would tell me to do it on my own...spending my transportation, and going there, and sitting through those boring sessions. I was not getting anything from it. They were not helping me... I was not there just to make up your numbers...so I stopped going... .." Michelle

Question 4: What services and supports are most valuable to immigrant women looking for work or training for work?

Literacy, active interventions, integrated service planning, volunteering and expanded social networks, are the most valued supports. English literacy is the most highly valued training program. LINC programs provide literacy training in a safe community, where new connections and lasting friendships are formed:

“A lot of them have said LINC saved their lives...Eve

“LINC is set up as language in real life use, so we have themes like going to restaurants, opening a bank account, going to the doctor and speaking to them about your illnesses...they don't realise it's English learning...when it's another activity altogether...“...most of them look at me as family members....some of my students tell me I am an older sister, some who tell me I am like a younger sister. I see that association of being part of their family. It's [the ISO center] their life for most of the people that come here. They find a family thrown into this ocean we call Canada. By the time they learn to swim, they have developed good relationships...even when they leave, they keep in touch...”Rosanna

Active and timely interventions are of utmost importance to removing barriers to work and training goals as shown in these two expressions: (1) Rosanna tells how she offered her client the opportunity to rethink discrimination using the frame of literacy , and; (2) Lynn shares she helps immigrants understand social norms. These important interventions have tangible human outcomes for immigrants:

“...there are many dialectical interferences in the spoken version of English [in Anglo-Indians]. They learn reading and writing in school [in India] but there is not much speaking and listening. And these students come here feeling they are very qualified to get into the job stream when people can't really understand what they are speaking...then the feel discriminated against for the accent. I tell them to take it positively....work on the pronunciation that is more the issues than discrimination... When they can't understand what

you are saying they probably move on to the next comprehensible candidate and just recruit them for the job...Sometimes they [students] are offended...and then there are students who really worked on it; they take the feedback seriously...we sort of sat down and isolated what the problem might be. Worked on it closely...and we had great results... It's probably the relationship that I have with them...they are not bitter about that...and most of my students stay in touch with me. So I guess I am doing something right.” Rosanna

“ we have to get them to understand how to take the bus, how to ask for directions...you would never believe how nervous that girl was just to go to the bank...there are certain ways to express ourselves that are not used here...you have to understand the Canadian nuances, their expressions...we teach what we call life skills...not just grammar and vocabulary...when someone says how are you, do you tell them about all the pains you have in your back and arm? No! In Canada, how are you? Is like good morning....no one tells you when you are migrating this is how it works...” Lynn

Barriers, positionalities, work/training goals and support-seeking are interconnected.

Understanding the barriers is important:

“...language learning happens at its best when the student is stress free...when they are stressed out about other issues at home and they are not willing to seek help for it, the stress stays with them...that does impede learning especially with the lower levels...last November [Citizenship & Immigration Canada] have said they have to have a LINC level 3 in speaking and listening [for citizenship]...There is a lot of pressure from husbands of these women, to get to the level 3 ...Rosanna

“I feel everything is connected. Housing is important; if you have a good place you will have a good family you will have a good environment...your mind is relaxed and you can focus on what you want. You will focus on your career [and] improve it...” Harjeet

Volunteering helps build much-needed networks and relevant job skills. ISOs identify suitable volunteer posts and support required adjustments to pre-migration attitudes towards volunteering:

“... I mean when they told me about volunteering I said “why should I?” Why should I pay my bus fare or put gas in my car to go volunteer somewhere when I already have the experience. We don’t have a culture of volunteering [but] volunteering gets you not only the experience but the connections and that is looked upon here [Canada] as something great.” Lynn

“ I told them do for a volunteer, don’t look for money...sometimes they become upset...”what am I going to do I already had a good position I was a big physician”...I always tell them it doesn’t matter [if] you are a doctor you don’t have to be a volunteer in a doctor or pharmacy place. You can do a volunteer in a different place, even in a library...get this experience and it will benefit you...” Harjeet

A welcoming Peel community and opportunities to build up immigrant networks are highly valued supports. Positive encounters with other Canadian-born citizens, and earlier immigrants, are important to build self-confidence. Negative encounters build depression and isolation.

“...I find that some people are not patient...I have heard more than once, especially in [Major Retailer Name] where people will say what are you doing here? If you can’t speak the language why are you here? Think about how that feels...they [immigrants] already have low self-confidence...” Lynn.

The Canadians...they are very polite. I get sometimes embarrassed when I am looking for words but when you find the other person is understanding and smiling, you know, you didn’t have that embarrassment no more.” Katija

“I’m sorry to say this, even in our own communities [in Peel Region], people are afraid when you don’t have jobs, they are afraid that you touch them for help...as long as we stay in this financial situation that we are at right now, it will continue to be small I am very sure of that...you know in [pre-migration country] we call it Wasta – the big W where you get jobs through influence. But that Wasta is all capital letters here [Canada].” Michelle

Question 5: What services and supports were desirable to recent immigrant women but not available to them?

Information, interconnected planning, financial aid for training, community awareness campaigns, and, mentorship, were the most desirable supports. Additionally, respondents indicated how community awareness programs would help to build a more positive environment for their settlement and integration. ISO(s) and immigrant women agree that information needs are pressing:

“I am Google-searching things out for them all the time...while informing them that I am not qualified to do this...I don’t want to be in the position where I am not giving you ample information and you are entirely banking on [it].” Rosanna

“Information now I would say in hindsight that it was readily available but at the time, I don’t know I was probably looking in all the wrong places, I was probably missing forms, I probably did not have people to guide me.” Lynn

“Recently my immigration lawyer ...wrote to me... told him about my situation and he said oh you know what, you should move North, move North and you will get jobs more easily...I have a home here now...I want to put roots somewhere. Why did you not tell me this before I came? When you asked me where I was going we had to write it in the immigration forms and what city you were going to...And now you are suggesting that I move?” Michelle

ISOs explain the complexities of providing service and reveal how they approach clients from a multidimensional perspective. Some ISOs operate separately from, and others are co-located with, employment counselling. All ISOs express a strong desire to be more connected together and to other service portals:

“..Each mind is a different pattern or frame of mind...it goes slowly like a dose of medicine. You have to be a doctor when you are doing the counselling...you can’t just force them – sign here, this is a class you have to go...it’s one’s own decision to participant...we

try to give them the [new]social values...it's step by step assessment...we give them wellness programs first...clear out the mind..." Rochelle

"...we refer them to...settlement agencies that are targeted to employment...we lose contact once they are there..." Asha

"we are lucky we have so many programs here – dental clinic, Services Canada...employment department, Ontario Works...food bank...volunteer services..." Eve

Alternate ways of accessing training services are desirable. Katija shares how she thinks about her interrupted career and wishes she had sources of funding to continue her studies while she is home with her children:

"Sometimes in a sad reflection you are thinking that time is passing, time is passing and you have career back home, and you didn't make any step to make a career here. So it like, it is not lost time because are taking care of your children...in Canada you find yourself running after time ...there is opportunities, but you should have funding. Who will fund you? In my case, my husband has just part job. So I want, I have the willingness to do studies, but the means are not there." Katija

Rosanna shares her vision for community support and individual mentorship for new immigrants. Community awareness is important to increase tolerance and understanding of literacy issues, and encourage more Peel residents to be kind and active participants in the settling in process:

"I would like to formulate sort of an alumni of you know, the people leaving the program and then coming back to talk to newcomers from you know, their perspective. To say I was where you were. Giving them that direction and that hope that things are possible. And from the alumni we can have other connections like...people in the same profession helping people out from here. The connections I have are more personal...I am not able to connect a newcomer from an organizational point of view..." Rosanna

“ I do interpretation...whether there is an interpreter or not, you [Service Canada employee] have to be talking to the client...at least give them a chance to try and understand...willingness and time, time is really important...when someone makes you feel uncomfortable you are not going to ask them another question” Lee

*“I would day that the citizens in Brampton, Toronto, people need to be aware that your co-operation of this situation, and tolerance and acceptance can mean a whole world to these new people who are coming here. We need more of those awareness campaigns...”
Rosanna*

Question 6: How do immigrant women feel about their future and what concerns them?

Expressions range from depression to resilience to inspiration. Immigrants are optimistic, adjust their expectations, and embrace underemployment. At the same time, many are exploring options to return home. Katija shared her inspirational vision for the future of immigrant communities:

“They do want to better themselves; they do want to get a job. We have had several that have found employment, even if it’s not what they want to do. I don’t know if they are just happy that they have a job, but they don’t complain. I don’t know if they are just settling [but] they are able to see the silver lining in things...” Eve

“I kept encouraging her...I know you need the money but you still have to focus [or you] will get stuck in this factory...get stuck in this cycle of really it’s poverty living pay check to pay check, they are underemployed and the skills they came here with will be out-dated by the time they are able to break the cycle, if they break the cycle” Asha.

“I was going into a depression...I was getting desperate. I would stand at the window every morning and see everyone going to work and I would think and say when it is going to be my turn... I don’t know anymore which way I am going... I can’t go on stressing...I will do what I have to do. I will keep applying here, I will keep forging here...see if I can go back [to pre-migration country]” Michelle

“Yes we are in this country, we left our family, the important thing is that we should adapt and we should share. We should be active here. It is our society. We should play a role so that we can have, how can I explain it? So that we can give to the other generation a good hope... especially the children. So we should be efficient. We should not keep ourselves isolated. Because I find in here, especially, Mississauga, that some communities, they seclude, you know? They stay together. They are not open to the other communities. It is a bad thing. We should open to other communities. We should be one.” Katija

CONCLUSIONS & DISCUSSION

The sample in this study was perhaps too small to claim generalizability; however, research findings in the interviews reinforced themes from the literature review:

- *Expectations for work commensurate with educational attainment;*
- *Insufficient support for young children/responsibilities for home;*
- *Re-credentialing delays and denials of prior knowledge*
- *Dwindling finances force low-skill, low-pay, survival jobs;*
- *Poorly developed networks;*
- *Discrimination;*
- *Lowered financial and social outcomes.*

Marginalized positions are found to arise from:

- Negative encounters with work/training without intervention;
- RPL outcomes, and;
- Getting lost in the system.

Marginalized positions can be improved through:

- Individualized service plans - arrival to employment;
- *Active and early* interventions and supports;
- Improved interconnectivity between immigrant women, support agencies and government service organizations.

Negative encounters determine longer term outcomes for work/training:

1. Michelle's first employment action was to register to work in her profession.

Despite credential approval by an international accreditation facility and CIC for immigration purposes, a provincial level professional association denied her

admission and credential equivalency. Michelle was immediately rendered subordinate to our RPL system, and her lifelong profession/professional income taken away. She remains underemployed, living in, and isolated from her community due to, poverty.

2. Lynn was told by CIC that her credentials were in high demand. After extensive job-seeking she settled for low-pay, low-skill work. Recognizing declining mental health from depression and loss of self-esteem she resigned for unemployment. During a job interview for a position for which she is highly qualified, Lynn faced discrimination and denigration. She remains underemployed, dejected and may return home.

Michelle and Lynn share they internalized early work encounters in severe emotional and psychological ways - loss of confidence, self-esteem, depression and humiliation, with spillover effects into the family finances. These women suffered in relative silence; connecting to support & services remains a chance event. Immigrant women locate ISO services through flyers posted at churches, grocery stores, and by word of mouth. There is no formal system for linking new immigrant women into a particular ISO. Settlement services are often uncoupled from employment supports and when clients get referred out, the intake ISO loses track of them and cannot confirm their work/training outcomes. Where negative encounters with training/work occur, like RPL denial, there is no process for appeal, or a known intermediary to which immigrant women are referred for active intervention for citizenship and inclusion. Moreover no one can tell – is this a settlement issue, a counselling issue, an employment issue, a local ISO issue, or a federal immigration issue? Therein lies the opportunity.

This research confirmed that immigrant challenges include – support for child care, literacy, RPL, self-confidence, depression, domestic responsibilities, finances, to name a few. Further the research validated that these challenges intersect with each other in individualistic ways, and those intersections affect work/training outcomes with tremendous variation and complexities. ISOs provide a dizzying array of settlement supports, display incredible passion for their work, and concern for their clients. Settlement counsellors and Literacy instructors regularly call to bear higher-order, and professional, counselling skills to unravel these complex intersectionalities in their clients’ work/training goals, to determine the right support path. They tell us that more interconnectivity is required between all actors and that full visibility to all the services and supports available to immigrants, service locations and access processes is lacking. This interconnectivity is essential for an integrated approach to the complex and interwoven needs of immigrant women. They are a voice waiting to be heard and expertise to leverage for change.

Yet more interconnectivity may not be enough to affect the marginalized position of immigrant women. Traditional settlement supports such as emotional counselling, or vocational supports like the TESL Michelle completed, were not the equitable, immediate or targeted solution for an RPL denial because following their completion, Michelle remains marginalized and worse off. A quick and effective intervention with RPL to restore Michelle’s professional status was needed. Similarly, Lynn likely would not have benefited from resume-writing or interviewing skills following her negative interview; what she likely needed was an authorized intermediary in the labour market, advocating for her employment. This research suggests that the opportunities for a more active

approach to service and supports based on social goals for inclusion is at hand: Katija's stated goal is to seek bi-lingual employment in a few years, and her stated desire is for financial aid to ready herself for work. Her current support activity is participation in conversational English classes. This is a good first step. Additional support interventions for Katija, targeted to her stated work/training goals, might include providing applications for financial aid, and on-line program options for training. Perhaps with targeted job-search support, Katija might be able to find translation work that could be done from home targeting the positionality she described of, needing to repay her spouse's RPL debt before any training investments could be made in her own education.

Further studies of the interconnected experiences of recent immigrant women, and how these contribute to marginalized positions are warranted. These studies, and ongoing program and policy strategists, should actively engage in opportunities to further unravel the complex intersectionalities of recently immigrated women, in contexts of work/training and support/services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Immigrant Service Organizations (ISO)

- A single publication for Peel Region of all newcomer services available to residents of Peel.
- Examination of best practice models for multidimensional and individualized service plans for immigrants from arrival to employment.
- Expansion of Co-op placement opportunities.
- New or enhanced modalities such as distance-learning to accommodate survival work.
- An annual conference for all ISO staff - best practice sharing, international advances in newcomer settlement approaches, opportunities for informal networking and building relationships.

Region of Peel

- Fund an annual ISO conference (see above)
- Formalize planning sessions for program funding and service delivery - ISO and immigrant women representation and addresses findings and recommendations of client survey.
- Create links between credentialing organizations and Peel Region employers. Establish an appeal process for immigrants.
- Launch a local campaign to Canadian employers to:
 - Establish understanding of the marginalized positions of recently immigrated women;
 - Solicit Canadian employer-support for understanding how to deem and seek support on, credential equivalency;
 - Increase the number of co-op placements that are available;
 - Provide guidelines on interviewing with sensitivity to newcomers

Government of Canada – Citizenship & Immigration Canada (CIC)

- Review the location, processes and content of pre-migration, and upon-arrival information that are provided to immigrants. Identify non-CIC actors in the immigration process (immigration lawyers for example) and ensure that they are provided and have a responsibility to provide their clients with standardized and approved information.
- Identify all authorized re-credentialing organizations and create and publish standardized processes, accountabilities and timelines for the evaluation of immigrant credentials.
- Establish an RPL appeal system/ombudsman.
- Launch a national campaign to Canadian employers to:
 - Establish understanding of the marginalized positions of recently immigrated women;
 - Solicit Canadian employer-support for understanding how to deem and seek support on, credential equivalency;
 - Increase the number of co-op placements that are available;
 - Provide guidelines on interviewing with sensitivity to newcomers.
- Fund research on best practices on support systems which have proven effective in reducing the marginalized positions of recently landed immigrant women looking for work or training.
- Promote interconnectivity between ISOs, municipal, provincial and federal organizations that address immigration policy, funded newcomer settlement services and supports.

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