MIGRATION, RESETTLEMENT, RACIALIZATION, AND WELL-BEING PERSPECTIVES FROM IMMIGRANT MEN IN CANADA

Liza Lorenzetti,
Christine A. Walsh,
Kyle D. Mack,
Vic Lantion, Binu Sebastian,
Pol Ngeth,
Abbas Mancey

Abstract

Migration is a significant life transition often associated with multiple and complex impacts for individuals, families, and communities. Immigrants to Canada, for example, have noted that resettlement challenges include employability, linguistic barriers, and foreign credential accreditation (Chen, Smith, & Mustard, 2010; Schellenberg & Maheux, 2007). For a substantial population, migration and resettlement in Canada are also affected by racialization and racism (Benjamin et al., 2010; Block & Galabuzi, 2011; Canada Revenue Agency, 2005). Further, an emerging body of literature connects racism and other forms of discrimination to negative health outcomes and a decreased sense of personal and family well-being (James et al., 2010). Although studies have explored the connection between family conflict, domestic violence, and immigration and resettlement, (Guruge, 2007; Guruge et al., 2010; Smith, 2004) insufficient attention has been paid to the repercussions of migration and resettlement on the well-being of racialized men specifically, and its subsequent relationship to family wellness.

To address this limitation in the literature, the ethno-culturally diverse team of male and female co-researchers in the Men's Action Network Calgary [MAN-C], a community-based initiative whose objective is to study and enhance the role of men in preventing domestic violence, applied a feminist participatory action research [FPAR] approach (Frisby, Reid, Millar, & Hoeber, 2005; Reid & Frisby, 2008) to explore how racialized immigrant men understand their experiences of migration and resettlement in Canada. In this context, MAN-C co-researchers raised concern about the negative impacts of migration and resettlement in Canada on personal wellbeing, family stress, and domestic violence. To investigate this relationship further, we employed a general qualitative design and used a focus group method (Morgan, 1998). This approach complemented the FPAR nature of the MAN-C initiative, which was designed to capture individuals' personal experiences as "transformative and anti-oppressive qualitative research" that aims to motivate participants and other stakeholders to appreciate these issues on a deeper level (Lorenzetti, 2013, p. 456).

MAN-C co-researchers developed the following research questions to guide the focus group discussion: (1) What are men's experiences of the societal expectations to 'lead' from the front to make their migration a success?; (2) How does this social burden relate to family stress?; and (3) How do men's levels of post-migration 'success' affect the quality of their family relationships? In the context of a research practicum, one co-researcher, an Bachelor of Social Work student, led the project with direct supervision of a PhD student, whose dissertation research was the MAN-C study, and a senior faculty member. A grounded theory method of open, axial, and selective coding was employed to analyze the focus group data (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

The focus group was facilitated by the lead student co-researcher with supervision from the PhD student who also took notes during the session. Twelve co-researchers participated in the focus group: six racialized immigrant and refugee men, two racialized immigrant and refugee women, and two Aboriginal allies (one male and one female). The study found the following five unique and interconnected factors associated with the migratory and resettlement processes of racialized men in Canada:

(1) Migratory and resettlement stress: Co-researchers noted that perceptions about the migratory experience were influenced by variety of factors that generated stress including pre-migration issues such as experiences of war and persecution, education and position in the home country as well as preparation for anticipated challenges in the settlement country.

(2) Unmet expectations: Disappointment, frustration, and shame were described by co-researchers as frequent consequences of having unmet expectations from the migration and resettlement process. Further, co-researchers underscored that unmet expectations related to employability and credential recognition negatively impacted family wellness and feelings of hope and optimism.

(3) Conflicting values: Co-researchers described how many migrants from collective cultures hold values and belief systems that differ markedly from the individualism which they experienced in Canada. In addition, one co-researcher explained how collectivist culture and the negative impacts of being racialized in Canada adversely influenced help-seeking behavior.

(4) Health and wellness impacts from pre-migration trauma to immigration policies: Co-researchers strongly identified the impact of immigration policies on family and individual wellness. Other pre-migration realities outlined in the above theme areas also influenced personal health and family well-being.

(5) Resilience and hope. Co-researchers discussed the ways in which many individuals adopt strategies to remain hopeful and resilient in the face of numerous stressors and challenges associated with migration, resettlement, and racialization. Spirituality emerged as a key resiliency factor. Further, individual traits and outlooks had an important bearing as to how the post migration-experience is viewed. Hope and resilience exerted a strong influence on migration and resettlement experiences.

While some factors impacted the participants in similar ways, there was also a diversity of experiences that were shared. Racism was identified as an overarching construct that impacted all factors and, in turn, affected individual and family wellness. Interestingly, co-researchers also paralleled the experiences of racialized immigrant men with the realities of Canada's Aboriginal peoples living away from their reserve communities. The presence of Aboriginal allies in the focus group was a catalyst for these comparisons and promoted a deeper understanding of these parallels.

Based on the findings of this study, the following four initial considerations were developed. First, a shift in focus is required with regard to the support systems extended to newcomers to Canada such that overall individual and family wellness and happiness is targeted, as opposed to solely addressing basic individual survival needs of migrants, such as financial stability and accommodation. Secondly, official policies regarding newcomers to Canada should evolve with an understanding of how systemic and institutionalized racism continues to affect individuals and families throughout their post-migration and resettlement periods. Third, official support systems, through their policies and procedures, must acknowledge and address the unique realities that racialized newcomers bring to the Canadian nation. Finally, further research is required to explore specifically the ways in which men's experiences with migration and resettlement in Canada interact with racialization to contribute to or elevate the risks of family un-wellness, conflict, and domestic violence.

This qualitative study was exploratory in nature and was limited by participant sample size, the geographic location, and the numerous similarities among group members, such as higher education levels and a shared commitment to an anti-racism, feminist analysis. Further research and community dialogue are needed to support and advance the issues outlined in this research and to develop appropriate and culturally-safe prevention and intervention initiatives. This study highlights the resettlement challenges and the resiliency of racialized immigrant men as an area requiring further attention. From a primary prevention approach, addressing the barriers to resettlement for racialized immigrant men is an important contribution to improved personal, family, and community well-being.

Key words: migration; resettlement; racialization; feminist participatory research; well-being

Author Biographies

Liza Lorenzetti PhD (c), MSW, RSW,
Faculty of Social Work, University of Calgary
Alberta, Canada

Liza Lorenzetti is an instructor, researcher, and PhD candidate in the Faculty of Social Work, at the University of Calgary. As a social work practitioner and activist for the past 25 years, her work in the area of social change has focused on gender-based violence, racism, and poverty, as well as decolonization, and peace-building. Liza firmly believes in the interconnectedness of all oppressions and the importance of doing one's own personal work as the root for social change. She is passionate about preserving and enhancing civic engagement, social responsibility, and the "commons" – our public spaces for inquiry, acts of kindness, resource sharing, and democratization.

Christine A. Walsh is a professor Faculty of Social Work, at the University of Calgary. As an educator, researcher and activist she is interested in conducting emancipatory forms of research in collaboration with marginalized populations affected by poverty, homelessness and violence.

Kyle D. Mack is a school counsellor and English as a Second Language (ESL) Instructor at Equilibrium International Education Institute in Calgary as well as a member of Men's Action Network Calgary. He has taught English language learners professionally in both Canada and The Islamic Republic of Iran and enjoys a strong professional interest in assisting, empowering, and advocating for newcomers to Canada. He is also deeply interested in nurturing multiculturalism and diversity while combating the social injustices associated with racism and Eurocentric oppression. Kyle holds a Bachelor of Social Work degree from the University of Calgary.

Vic Lantion is an internationally educated nurse and physician and Program Manager of Ethno-Cultural Council of Calgary or ECCC. This position also coordinates SHARE (Sustaining Healthy and Awesome RElationships) program, a community-based domestic violence prevention initiative that works collaboratively with ethno-cultural communities and community partners to develop and implement engagement strategies that support the prevention of domestic violence. Vic was involved in engaging men in the Philippines utilizing men's health as an entry point. He is currently pursuing his foreign medical credential accreditation with the Medical Council of Canada.

Binu Sebastian has a Master's degree in social work and BA in philosophy. He has been involved in human rights work in both India and Canada. His areas of focus include progressive policy advocacy, rights of rural populations, and expanding the roles and influences of civil society. Most recently, he has been working on gender equality and domestic violence prevention with Men's Action Network Calgary, using research as a vehicle for social change.

Pol Ngeth holds an MSW from the University of Calgary. Over the course of his career as a multicultural counsellor, community development worker, and clinical social worker, he has held positions at public & non-profit organizations including Alberta Health Services, Calgary and Area Child and Family Services, and various immigration organizations. Pol has worked with individuals, families, groups, and community associations focusing on trauma, immigrant and refugee issues, cultural adaptation, and family / domestic violence prevention. He is a member of Men's Action Network Calgary and has received the following awards: Recipient of the Human Voice Project of the Calgary Centre for Global Community 2013 – 2014 and John Hutton Memorial Award for Social Policy / Action – Alberta College of Social Workers (ACSW) 2008.

Abbas Mancey has worked in the areas of community development, sexual and gender-based violence policy and prevention, and in efforts to advance gender equality in Guyana, the Caribbean, Africa, and Canada. He has led several successful community-based projects engaging men and boys to reduce gender based violence in Guyana while serving as the Director of the National Domestic Violence Policy Unit for the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security. In Africa, Abbas was part of a research team to develop a media messaging campaign targeting men and boys on sexual and gender-based violence for the Great Lakes Region Sub-Saharan Africa. He is an executive member of the Caribbean Male Action Network (CariMAN) and a member of the Men's Action Network of

References

Benjamin, A., Este, D., James, C., Lloyd, B., Bernard, W.T., & Turner, T. (2010). *Race and well-being: The lives, hopes and activism of African Canadians*. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing.

Block, S., & Galabuzi, G.E. (2011). *Canada's colour coded labour market*. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. Ottawa.

Canada Revenue Agency. (2005). *Applicants assisting ethnocultural communities* (Reference No. CPS 023). Ottawa: Government of Canada Publications.

Chen, C., Mustard, C., & Smith, P. (2010). The prevalence of over-qualification and its association with health status among occupationally active new immigrants to Canada. *Ethnicity & Health*, *15*(6), 601-619.

Corbin, J. & Strauss, A. (1990). Grounded theory research: procedures, canons, and evaluative   criteria. *Qualitative Sociology*, *13*(1), 3-20.

Frisby, W., Reid, C.J., Millar, S., & Hoeber, L. (2005). Putting "participatory" into participatory forms of action research. *Journal of Sport Management*, 19, 367-386.

Guruge, S. (2007). *The influence of gender, racial, social, and economic inequalities on the production and responses to intimate partner violence in the post-migration context*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada.

Guruge, S., Shirpak, K.R., Hyman, I., Zanchetta, M., Gastaldo, D., & Sidini S. (2010). A meta-synthesis of post-migration change in marital relationships in Canada. *Canadian Public Health 101*(4) 327-31.

James, C., Este, D., Thomas,W., Benjamin, A. Lloyd, B., & Turner, T. (2010). Race & well-being. *The lives, hopes, and activism of African Canadians*. Toronto, NO: CA: Fernwood.

Lorenzetti, L. & Este, D. (2011). War and partner violence: Refugee women's experiences and impacts on resettlement. *Canadian Social Work*, *12*(1), 76-81

Reid, C. & Frisby, W. (2008). Continuing the journey: Articulating dimensions of feminist participatory research (FPAR), In P. Reason and H. Bradbury (eds), *The Sage Handbook of Action Research* (2008), London: CA.

Schellenberg, G., & Maheux, H. (2007). Immigrants' perspectives on their first four years in Canada: Highlights from three waves of the longitudinal survey of immigrants to Canada. *Canadian Social Trends, special edition 2007*, 6 -7. Retrieved March 7, 2014, from www.statcan.gc.ca

Smith, E. (2004). *Nowhere to turn? Responding to partner violence against immigrant and visible minority women*. Ottawa: Canadian Council on Social Development.

Wells, L., Hurlock, D., Antonio, M., Lantion, V., Abboud, R., Claussen, C., & Lorenzetti, L. (2013). A context of domestic violence: Learnings for prevention from the Calgary Filipino community. *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies*, *4*(1), 147-165.