Critical Social Work

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Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information can be found at: <http://uwindsor.ca/criticalsocialwork>

Link to article:

<http://www1.uwindsor.ca/criticalsocialwork/newcomerresettlementglobalizedSW>

Critical Social Work, 2013 Vol. 14, No. 1

Newcomer ReSettlement in a Globalized World: The Role of Social Workers in Building Inclusive Societies

Critical Social Work 14(1)

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Author Note

The author completed the research reported in this study as part of her Master of Social Work (MSW) requirements (Wilfrid Laurier University). This research was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Graduate Scholarship, a Hilary Weston Scholarship, and funding from Grand Erie Training and Adjustment Board (GETAB).

Acknowledgement

The author thanks the MSW thesis committee members Dr. Martha Kuwee Kumsa (chair), Dr. Shoshana Pollack and Laura Mastronardi as well as the ISTEP members for their guidance throughout the research process. She extends her gratitude to the participants who made this research possible. She appreciates Dr. Juaane Clark and Carla Nardone's feedback on the initial version of the article and the reviewer's thoughtful and detailed comments. She is especially grateful to the Editor Carol F. Scott for her valuable insights that made the paper stronger.

Abstract

This paper presents findings from part of a larger Community-based Participatory Research (CBPR) entitled 'Newcomer Settlement and Integration in *Education, Training, Employment, Health and Social Support* in Grand Erie'. Data was gathered from 212 newcomers (men and women) and 237 service providers. The qualitative and quantitative responses to the survey questionnaires (newcomers and service providers) on *social supports* highlight newcomers' experiences of discrimination, as well as draw attention to the unique barriers that immigrant/refugee women experience in their resettlement. The multifaceted nature of factors contributing to newcomer integration requires collaboration between newcomers, service providers, and government officials. The study findings have important implications for social work practise and settlement policies in an increasingly globalized world.

Keywords: immigrants, rural, community-based, social support, visible minorities, globalization

The global movement of people in response to social, political, economic, and environmental unrest is on the rise (Healy, 2008). Authors argue that the intense forces of globalization in the 21st century have facilitated the international movement of men and women (Dominelli, 2010; Healy, 2008; Hiranandani, 2011). In 2010, Canada admitted more than 280,000 immigrants—the highest proportion in over fifty years—mainly from non-European nations, rather than the traditional European regions (Chui, 2011; Eliasson 2011). Canada's current immigration programs that are focused on economic, social, and humanitarian goals, are responsible for this shift in the source of immigration from European to non-European regions (Statistics Canada, 2008). Today, women make up a large portion of global migrants. In Canada, 52% of migrants are women (Chui, 2011). One of the defining features of globalization is that it has produced a globally integrated world, meaning that the policies and actions (political, economic, and social) of one country now directly and/or indirectly affect the social and economic well-being of other countries and the overall social health of the planet (Healy, 2008; Hiranandani, 2011; Midgely, 1997). Social workers are particularly concerned with the negative consequences of globalization. Cultural imperialism, human trafficking, environmental problems, current financial crisis, and other social issues “have had a profound effect on social work practice, changing service delivery; altering the labour process for professional social workers” (Dominelli, 2010, p. 599). More than ever before, social workers are more likely to encounter immigrants and refugees in their case loads (Healy, 2008). Growth in international migration and increasing cultural diversity in the receiving countries influence social work practice “producing demands for indigenization or the development of locality specific forms of theory and practice” (Dominelli, 2010, p. 599).

Even though a large number of immigrants continue to settle in Canada's three largest urban centres – Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver – the last decade has witnessed a secondary migration of immigrants from these large urban centres to small-town Canada and rural areas (Burstein, 2007; Houle, 2007; Sethi, 2010), which are not typical immigrant reception zones. In addition, there is heightened interest from small and mid-sized urban centres in attracting and retaining this international population as a way “to offset population decline, to ensure cultural continuity (linguistic and ‘way of life’) and to ease labour market adjustment” (Burstein, 2007, p. 42). With a total population of 237,339 Grand Erie is a blend of urban and rural communities in Ontario. This region includes the City of Brantford and County of Brant (population 93,650), Haldimand County (population 44,876) and Norfolk County (population 63,175) (Workforce Planning Board of Grand Erie, 2012). With the arrival of 1,575 immigrants between 2001 and 2006, Brantford and Brant-Haldimand-Norfolk County experienced an annual average growth of approximately 21.1% in its immigrant population over the ten year period before (2001 to 2006) (Halyk, 2009).

This paper presents the findings from a larger 2009 study that explored newcomer integration in *education, training, employment, health, and social supports* from the perspective of newcomers and service providers (Sethi, 2009, 2010) and focuses on discussions in the social support section. The key finding that newcomers in Grand Erie experienced discrimination, in all the aforementioned variables explored, will be discussed in more details below. Further, both newcomers and service providers agreed that largely, newcomers did not feel connected to their host community. In light of the movement of international populations to smaller urban-rural areas, such studies are vital to create awareness amongst social workers about the issues that

immigrants and refugees from diverse cultures experience in their host country (and host community). Such knowledge is essential to equip social workers and other service providers with tools to address the unique needs of international population and to respond to them in a timely and culturally sensitive manner.

Research Design and Methodology

Creating Partnerships

In the summer of 2008, in response to the unprecedented growth in international migration and evolving ethno-cultural diversity in Grand Erie, several community stakeholders, including immigrants and refugees, conveyed. The consensus at these meetings was that it was essential to explore settlement supports to foster newcomer integration in this region. As a result of these community consultations, Immigrant, Settlement, Transition, Employment and Partnership (ISTEP) was formed. ISTEP is a non-profit community-based immigrant task-force that operates under Workforce Planning Board of Grand Erie. Its mission is to support the integration of newcomers into their host societies by facilitating the sharing of information between the immigrant service agencies and immigrants and refugees, while establishing diverse and effective community partnerships. In 2009, ISTEP members approached the author – a newcomer, visible minority, and Brantford resident for 14 years – due to her expertise in research and requested that she assist them in exploring newcomer settlement needs in Grand Erie. In return, they would provide financial and other supports needed to complete the research. The author decided to conduct the research on newcomer settlement and integration as part of her Master of Social Work (MSW) thesis. The study reported in this article is a result of a mutually-beneficial partnership between ISTEP committee and the author.

Project Purpose and Theoretical Orientation

The key objective of the study was to collect a baseline data on the supports available and those that were needed for newcomer integration in Grand Erie in five areas: *Employment, Education, Training, Health, and Social Supports* from the perspectives of newcomers and service providers. This paper draws upon the data from the larger study and discussions are focused on newcomers and service providers' perceptions of the gaps in *Social Supports* for newcomer integration in Grand Erie. The goal is to add to literature on the re-settlement experiences of newcomers in Canada's mid-sized cities and rural areas. In the current study, the selection criterion for *newcomers* was as follows: (a) a recent immigrant, conventional refugee, refugee claimant, and/or other foreign born persons who have arrived in Canada within the last five years; (b) 18 years older; and (c) resided in Grand Erie. This study identified *service providers* as individuals who were currently employed or in the past had worked for a profit or non-profit agency/organization that supported newcomers in this region.

The operational definition of *Social Support* was adapted from Duffy & Wong (2003) to include: (a) a sense of community – people feel that they belong to or fit in the neighbourhood (for example, they are included in social and civic life); and (b) people have confidence in the availability and accessibility to the formal and informal supports (such as, a network of family, co-workers, friends, ethnic community, agency, etc.) in the host society. To achieve the

objectives of the proposed study, a Critical paradigm was adopted. A Critical paradigm is well versed to explore the settlement supports of a heterogeneous group of newcomers because it validates and contextualizes service users' experiences, links the personal and political, and believes that people can participate in their own social change (Hick, Fook, & Pozzuto, 2005; Mullaly, 2002). As Denzin and Lincoln (2005) assert:

Whereas traditional researchers see their task as description, interpretation, or reanimation of a slice of reality, critical researchers often regard their work as a first step toward forms of political action that can redress the injustices found in the field site or constructed in the very act of research (p. 305).

Within the critical paradigm, community-based participatory research (CBPR) methodology and an anti-oppressive theoretical framework was employed. CBPR is a philosophical and comprehensive framework that integrates theory, practice, and ideological commitment for change (Altpeter, Schopler, Flicker, & Savan, 2006; Galinsky & Pennell, 1999; Park, 1999). More often than not, community-based research involves the collaboration of community members (such as, grassroots activists, community-based organizations, social workers, etc.) and university researchers (Schulz, Krieger, & Galea, 2002). At its best, the outcome of such collaboration can have powerful and long-lasting results that reflect the investment of each party and the benefits of working together (Park, 1999). In anti-oppressive critical practice, a researcher/practitioner recognizes that there are multiple forms of oppression and social work practice can be both oppressive and liberating (Sin, 2007). Throughout the research process, every attempt was made to not fall into the trap of 'Race of Innocence', meaning, to not assume that due to subjugated position, the researcher was incapable of being oppressive to the research partners (Razack, 1998, p.196). Undoubtedly, the social location, as a researcher, could be viewed by the newcomers as dominant and subsequently, could be oppressive to research partners. The researcher also runs the risk of being the "expert" and "other" due to her education, skills, and expertise brought to the field of community research. Even so, the researcher's personal, professional and political struggles as a visible minority woman has given a deep understanding of the different dimensions of oppression that ethnic and racial minority groups experience, both at an individual and structural level. Finally, throughout the research process, this researcher was committed to collectively – in partnership with the marginalized members of society – change these oppressive conditions.

Ethical Considerations

Specific steps were taken to ensure the ethical integrity of the research. Firstly, this study was approved by the university Research Ethics Board (REB). A written statement in the consent form ensured the newcomers and service providers that their identities would remain confidential and that there was no risk to them in participating in the study. To further minimize potential risks, a list of community resources was made available to all newcomers should they experience stress while answering the questionnaire and require medical attention.

The Committee on Native American Child Health and Committee on Community Health Services (2004) convincingly argue that CBPR brings to light ethical concerns that are not raised in experimental laboratory research. For example, even though researchers may take all

precautions to ensure the social well-being of the research partner, it is possible that members of certain groups, such as, racial and ethnic minorities, will be stereotyped, as they share a collective identity. Further, social, political, and economic concerns may emerge in research, which might pose a risk or threat to the prosperity of that cultural group. Sometimes the pressure of the host society or one's ethnic community to participate in the study may override individual consent (Committee on Native American Child Health and Committee on Community Health Services, 2004). In order to minimize these risks, research participants (newcomers and service providers) were regarded as *partners*, not research subjects or participants, and therefore collaborated with them throughout the study. In addition, if a newcomer was uncomfortable in giving written consent, it was deemed that oral consent was acceptable for this study. Moreover, following Wadsworth's (1998) recommendation, a critical reference group, consisting of 5 newcomers who collaborated on a regular basis, was formed. This group enhanced the participatory element of the research, increased the reliability of the research findings, and helped to disseminate information to the community in a respectful manner that did not cause research partners any harm.

In CBPR, the researcher often wears several hats; such as, a 'facilitator', 'listener', 'catalyser', planner', and/or 'reporter' (O'Brien, 2001). Throughout the study, a dialogical and collaborative effort between the ISTEP task force and researchers was encouraged. O'Brien (2001) cautions that in this dialectical and collaborative process of participatory research, it is imperative to acknowledge and value every person's contribution as significant. As a result, if the debate challenges an individual's viewpoint, it often threatens the status quo of the practitioners, and the previous ways of doing things. When those ideas, judgements, and fears dominate the discourse it is essential to be attentive to these clues and emphasize learning through fostering reflective analysis among the practitioners. Throughout the study, a reflexive journal was maintained so that the researcher was always aware of potential biases as to not reproduce the oppressive conditions that the study was trying to eliminate in the first place (Mullaly, 2002). In a journal, the researcher recorded key discourses with ISTEP members, newcomers, and community members.

Survey Instrument

Two self-administered survey questionnaires – one for the newcomers and the other for the service providers – permitted the identification the multiple layers of challenges that newcomers experience in their settlements (Rubin & Babbie, 2008). Survey questions covered five areas: demographics, education, training, employment, health, and social supports. Consistent with the spirit of CBPR, the survey instrument emerged from intense consultation with newcomers, community stakeholders, and the ISTEP committee. To ensure comparability with other population surveys, service providers' and newcomers' questionnaires were adapted from the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants (LSIC): Wave 2, in an effort to meet the needs of the Grand Erie community (Statistics Canada, 2003). Permission was obtained from Statistics Canada for the use of the questionnaire. The consent form and the questionnaire items for the newcomers were translated and back translated between English and the two most spoken languages in this area (Urdu and Mandarin) to ensure satisfactory linguistic equivalence. Surveyed newcomers and service providers were asked to rate their level of agreement with a series of statements related to fostering newcomers social integration (using a 7-point scale: 1 = strongly agree, 7 = strongly

disagree). Research partners were also asked to rate service-related questions (e.g., using a 5-point scale: 1 = very interested, 5 = not interested at all; or 1 = very familiar, 5 = not familiar at all; or 1 = strongly in favour of, 7 = strongly against). For the yes/no or forced choice questions, research partners had to choose between two choices. For example, “have newcomers experienced discrimination, yes or no?” If they choose yes, a follow up question asked them to pick the location(s) where they had experienced discrimination from a set of pre-defined choices: “at work/place of employment”, “in School or other academic institution”, “neighbourhood”, “social service agencies”, “shopping malls”, “government offices”, “in the community”, “other [please specify]”.

Data Collection

Newcomers and service providers had the choice to complete the survey in person (using paper and pencil), on-line, or through survey monkey, a web-based survey tool (SurveyMonkey, 2013). In keeping with the principle of CBPR, the author researched the location that was most suitable to the newcomers in terms of data collection by collaborating with the key informants, such as, religious leaders, facilitators of multicultural groups, other immigrants, immigrant serving agencies, and members of ISTEP. Recruited newcomers gathered in groups of five to ten at prearranged times and locations, which they selected – for example, at community meeting rooms, their place of worship, English as a Second Language (ESL) class – to fill out the self-administered questionnaire, either in English or in the newcomers first language, if a translated version was available. Providing the newcomers the freedom to choose their location minimized some of the power imbalances between the researcher and research partners; thus, increasing the participation of those who are often difficult to reach such as immigrant women residing in rural areas of Grand Erie. Further, since many newcomers did not have access to the computers and may feel intimidated by technology, this method of in person paper and pencil form of collecting data proved was user-friendly and maximized the participation of newcomers.

In regards to service providers, the ISTEP task-force had a previously established database with names of representatives of the immigrant-serving agencies in Brantford and Brant-Haldimand-Norfolk counties. The link to the online survey was sent to all the members in this data base. Prior to data collection, agency service providers were provided with all study information and given the opportunity to clarify any issues. Making these connections, and giving people the relevant information prior to the data collection phase, increased research partners’ commitment and motivation to partake in the study.

The Sample

Newcomers. Most of the newcomers (66%) were female. The median age of newcomers was 40 years, with 70% between the ages of 25 to 44 years. The majority of the newcomers (65%) also self-identified as married. Research partners reported 45 different countries of origin, with India and China as the top two source countries of newcomers. In regards to their immigration status, approximately one-half (48%) were Landed Immigrants, over one-third (34%) were Canadian citizens, 5% were Refugees, 9% were in Canada on a Work permit, and only 1% were in Canada on a Visitor Visa. Most (88%) of the newcomers were living in the City of Brantford at the time of the survey. Newcomers spoke 37 different languages 69% could speak in English

and/or French and 71% could write in English and/or French 'fairly well' to 'well' before coming to Canada.

Service Providers. The majority (71%) of the study respondents represented a non-profit agency. Service providers represented 21 different categories of organizations, such as, employment agencies, women-centred organizations, settlement services, religious centres, educational institutes, sports/recreational facilities, health care, police, social services, and legal aid/clinic. Collectively, these agencies provided a wide range of services to newcomers and their family, including: settlement, financial, educational, social services, health care, child welfare, employment, recreational, children and youth care, women's, and/or family counselling. More than half (57%) of the service providers were employed in the urban regions of Brantford (57%) and Norfolk (19%), 11% worked in Brant County, and only one-tenth (10%) worked in rural areas of Haldimand. In terms of the characteristics of the newcomers, that the agencies served almost one-half (47%) of the study sample served an equal mix of male and female. Approximately 30% of the service providers suggested that the newcomers were primarily young adults between 25-34 years of age. In regards to the immigration status of their newcomer clients, as noted above, most were Canadian Citizens and majority of newcomer clients were from either China or India.

Data Analysis

This was an exploratory study designed to provide a preliminary picture of gaps in settlement services for newcomers; thus, primarily a descriptive level of statistical analysis was conducted. It is important to note that this study was not designed as mixed-methods study. Space was provided for the research partners to write their responses under an "other" category in the survey questionnaire if they felt that the choices offered were not applicable to their circumstances resulting in some qualitative data. Interestingly, this section produced limited qualitative data. The responses to the 'other' category were analyzed thematically.

Findings

Both newcomers (n=212) and service providers (n=237) completed the survey on demographics, education, training, employment, health, and social support. The demographic information for newcomers and service providers, as well as the findings on social support for newcomers, are reported. For detailed findings in employment, see Sethi & Gebotys (2012), for Health, see Sethi (2012), and for an overview of the study, see Sethi (2009, 2010).

The main findings to newcomers and service providers' responses are reported below. Because the qualitative data was very limited and primarily in the form of quotes, it was integrated with the quantitative findings.

Discrimination

Successful integration of newcomers in Canada has been described as a "two way street" approach that requires accommodations and adjustments on both sides (i.e., from newcomers and the Canadian society). One of the core principles of a "two-way street" integration model is that newcomers and the larger host community respect one another's values, customs, obligations,

and rights (Citizenship & Immigration Canada (CIC), 2010, p.29). Sadly, the findings in this study reflect intolerance towards newcomers diverse background and cultures from certain members of the larger society. For example, newcomers in this study experienced discrimination in every variable explored: employment, education and training, health, and social support. The following quotes demonstrate some of the causes of newcomer discrimination. One research partner wrote, “I was discriminated because of my dress – hijab/burkha”; Another asserted, “...discriminated because of non-Canadian degrees: yes...”

When newcomers are discriminated, or are faced with unjust situation, it is important that they know where to go for help; approximately three-quarters (73%) of the newcomers felt safe in seeking help from the police services, 58% suggested that they know where they should go if they were injured at work, and slightly over half (53%) of research partners were familiar with legal services. However, less than half (46%) of the newcomers said that knew where to go if they experienced discrimination at work. The following service provider quote reflects the service providers’ bias towards certain members of the newcomer community: “I feel very strong that those who wear turbans... men... discriminate against women of all nationalities and scare women by the way they act towards other people.” On the other hand, a concerned service provider wrote: “Some newcomers have experienced discrimination more obviously and blatantly than others.” Table 1 compares the newcomer and service provider responses to the question: ‘*Have newcomers experienced discrimination?*’ and Table 2 provides information in regards to the ‘*Location where newcomers experienced discrimination*’.

Table 1
Have Newcomers Experienced Discrimination?

	Newcomers	Service Providers
Yes	40%	42%
No	41%	26%
Don't Know	19%	32%

Note: The column percentages total to 100%.

Table 2
Location of Discrimination

	Service Providers	Newcomers
At work	19%	22%
Academic Institute	16%	9%
Neighbourhood	17%	20%
Social Service Agencies	9%	7%
Shopping Malls	10%	12%
Government Offices	9%	12%
In the Community	19%	16%
Other	1%	1%

Note: The column percentages total to 100%.

Connection to the Host Community

In the context of the discrimination data reported above, it is not surprising that only approximately 44% of newcomers reported a sense of connection to the larger host community. In contrast, the majority (77%) of the newcomers reported being ‘connected’ to their ethnic community compared to only 19% the respondents who ‘did not feel connected’. Finally, a very small proportion of the respondents answered that they ‘don’t know’ if they felt connected to their ethnic community or to the larger Grand Erie community (4% and 7%, respectively).

Aside from experiences of discrimination another possible reason for this ‘lack of connection’ conveyed by newcomers is that even though most of the newcomers expressed an interest in joining neighbourhood or community groups, very few newcomers perceived their fair representation in these groups. For example, majority of the newcomers (88%) expressed an interest in joining ‘social groups’ (e.g., multicultural groups), ‘educational groups’ (e.g., to prevent racism) (83%), ‘health related groups’ (83%) (e.g., learning about prevention of diseases), ‘professional or networking groups’ (e.g., business groups) (76%), and ‘political groups’ (e.g., lobbying for a cause) (55%); yet, over half reported that the newcomer population was not well represented in most of the community groups – ‘political groups’ (62%), ‘health related groups’ (60%), ‘professional and networking groups’ (60%), and ‘educational groups’ (52%). The only exception was newcomers’ representation in ‘social groups’, where (51%) research partners perceived that that they were well represented in this group.

Amongst service providers, the bulk (95%) of the service providers ‘agreed’ that newcomers feel a sense of belonging to their ethnic community compared to just 5% who were ‘undecided’ on this issue. About half (51%) of the respondents ‘agreed’ that newcomers feel a sense of belonging to the larger community and a similar proportion (49%) ‘disagreed’. Service providers stated that newcomers lack of connection and representation to the host community was problematic: “Immigrants face problems due to lack of connection to community and/or lack of decent employment”. Service providers also indicated that newcomers were not able to fully participate in Grand Erie’s economic and/or political life: “Newcomers are active and skilled, but they are not given the opportunity to be an active member of the community....” Another service provider’s quote provides insight into other possible reasons of low representation of newcomers in neighbourhood or community groups: “Newcomers are active people, but they lose their interest to be active when they are forced to start their life from scratch.”

Barriers Specific to Immigrant Women

Even though 60 % of newcomers were university educated before coming to Canada, 51% reported either no income or an annual income of less than \$19,999 and only 1% of the research partners earned an annual income of over \$70,000. The median income was \$10,000. While a larger proportion of women (60%) than men (56%) were employed at the time of the study, more men (58%) than women (52%) were employed full-time.

It was clear from newcomers' and service providers' accounts and quotes that barriers specific to immigrant/refugee women negatively impacted their integration in Grand Erie. Both the newcomer and the service providers, for instance, agreed that the lack of a proper

transportation infrastructure especially in the rural areas of Grand Erie isolated immigrant/refugee women at home. Non-European immigrant/refugee women often put their husband's needs ahead of their own (for example, waiting to get their driver's license after their husband has obtained his license), it made them completely dependent upon their husband. Lack of culturally appropriate and affordable childcare also restricted immigrant/refugee women's ability to travel or to seek employment. One newcomer research partner wrote, "For women it is hard because I have to stay home". Another female newcomer's quote reflected a similar theme: "I have no friends, or transportation and no job...". It seems from the qualitative data that social isolation negatively impacted newcomer women's mental health: "...stay at home all time makes me sad, depressed." Immigrant women expressed a need for outreach workers that could attend to their needs in their home: "Help immigrant women at home - have community worker go to home - immigrant worker who is from same culture and understands immigrant women issue."

Service providers brought another issue to light in regards to immigrant women who were sponsored to Canada by their husband: "Woman abuse- isolated by partner- not familiar with legal rights, not allowed to access ESL, threatened by partner to pull sponsorship and telling her she'll be deported and never see children if doesn't do exactly what abuser says." Another service provider suggested: "We need to help immigrant women dependent on husband with a program that empowers them, educates them...they are isolated."

Relocation

Keeping in view the economic barriers that newcomers experienced in Grand Erie, their lack of connection to the Grand Erie community, and their experiences of discrimination, it does make sense that newcomers suggested 'to find better training or employment prospects (32%)', 'to be closer to family, friends and ethnic organizations' (20%), as well as to avoid discrimination (12%) and 'to avoid cultural barriers' (9%), as the reasons for their relocation to another city.

When service providers were asked about possible reasons for newcomer relocation, slightly more than half (51%) of the service providers suggested that one of the reasons for newcomer relocation would be to find better neighbourhoods (51%) free of discrimination and cultural barriers. Similarly to newcomer responses, service providers also suggested 'to find better employment or work' (81%), 'to be closer to family, friends and ethnic organizations' (83%), 'to be closer to work or study' (71%), and 'to be closer to their place of worship' (66%), as possible reasons for newcomer relocation.

These findings on discrimination, lack of connection to the large host community, and employment difficulties suggest that newcomers are not becoming fully engaged in the social, economic, political, and cultural life of Grand Erie. It is then surprising and promising that over half (53%) of the respondents were not planning to move out of Grand Erie, compared to 14% who were planning to move out. About 18% of the respondents were 'undecided' and 13% responded that they 'don't know'. Only 1% of the respondents marked their answer under the 'other' category. Therefore, the next logical question would be: *what would make newcomers stay in Grand Erie?*

Helping Newcomers Integrate

According to newcomer research partners the top five ways in which the larger community of Grand Erie can help newcomers in settling here were: ‘assisting newcomers through family issues, such as, child care and elder care’ (96%); ‘improving access to health care, recognizing foreign credentials’ (94%); ‘assisting newcomers to find job in their field of training’ (93%); ‘assisting with legal services’ (93%); and ‘helping newcomers feel welcome’ (93%). Further, the majority of newcomers (87%) were ‘in favour’ of constructing a multicultural centre in Grand Erie to support their integration compared to a minute proportion (2%) that was ‘against’ it. Approximately 9% of the newcomers were ‘neither in favour nor against’ a multicultural centre and only 3% marked their responses under the ‘other’ category.

When service providers were asked, “How interested would you say you are personally in helping newcomers integrate in Grand Erie (for example, be a mentor/volunteer your time)?”, most of them (70%) responded that they were ‘interested’ in helping newcomers, compared to only 8% who were ‘not interested’. It was surprising and a bit disturbing that about 22% of the service providers were ‘undecided’ on the issue. The five most popular responses from service providers in regards to fostering newcomer integration were: ‘there should be more and better collaboration between community agencies’ (92%), ‘encouraging greater collaboration between parents and teachers’ (92%), ‘recognizing foreign credentials’ (91%), ‘having a greater presentation of newcomers in committees related to issues about immigration’ (90%), and ‘having specialized programs for women migrants’ (88%). Similar to newcomer research partners, a large majority (83%) of service providers were ‘in favour’ of creating a multicultural centre in Grand Erie, compared to barely 1% who were ‘against’ it. Approximately, 15% of the service providers were ‘neither in favour nor against’ a multicultural Centre.

Both newcomers and service providers agreed that immigrants should run the multicultural centre; this is demonstrated by the following newcomer quote: “I favour multicultural centre if run by immigrants” and service provider quote: “Have multicultural centre to be run by immigrant.

Discussions

Immigrants and refugees move to another country leaving behind their friends, extended family, and places filled with memories. Rebuilding a life in a new country requires access to basic services (such as, housing and employment) as well as opportunities for social connections to both the host society and one’s ethnic community. It is well established in literature that access to social capital (i.e., formal and informal social networks) helps mediate newcomers’ access to resettlement stress (Arshad, 2011; Jasinkaja-Lahti, Liebkind, Jaakkola, & Reuter, 2006; Wong & Leung, 2008). Fong and Ooka (2006) refute the popular notion that there is a positive relationship between immigrants’ human capital resources (such as, level of education and language skills) and their social participation in the ethnic community and the host society. Fong and Ooka assert that researchers must not assume that higher the human capita, the higher the level of newcomer participation in informal activities in the ethnic community or the wider society. Rather, they consider immigrant participation patterns in informal social activities in multicultural Canada to be fluid. Immigrants actively engage with their social environment

adopting “patterns that best fit their situation rather than following one single path of integration” (Fong & Ooka, 2006, p. 370).

Data from the Grand Erie study suggests that although over three-quarters of newcomers expressed an interest in joining one of the *community* or *neighbourhood* networks (i.e., ‘social groups, ‘educational groups, ‘health related groups, and ‘professional or networking groups’), they felt that they were underrepresented in any of these aforementioned groups. It is possible that the newcomer’s under-representation in community/neighbourhood groups is because they were occupied in seeking jobs that pay decent wages. Sadly, 51% of newcomers either had no income or were earning \$19,999 or less. Scholars have argued that newly arrived immigrants struggling for economic survival has little time to spend on informal social activities (Fong & Ooka, 2006). The qualitative data brings to light some of the reasons (for example, discrimination, lack of opportunities, and job situation) of newcomers’ inability to fully participate in Grand Erie community networks. Having said that, reflecting on the newcomers’ low wages, the author finds it interesting that newcomers’ data reveals that they were more likely to be represented in ‘social groups’ (51%) as compared to ‘professional groups’ (40%). It is easy to speculate that through social contacts in multicultural events newcomers would develop personal and/or professional networks. However, participation in ‘professional groups’ that are focused on employment/business ventures would be more profitable to newcomers in regards to their economic status. One reason for newcomers’ higher representation in ‘social groups’ as compared to ‘professional groups’ may be that the City of Brantford has played an active role in raising awareness of newcomer issues through promotion of sociocultural events and enhancing newcomer membership in local social groups (e.g., groups engaged in organizing annual International festivals). Less attention has been paid to increasing their participation in professional, health, and/or political groups. As a society, we need to go beyond equating multiculturalism with ethnic foods, multicultural festivals, and diverse music. Intercultural dialogue must also “focus on practical goals that transcend all cultures”; such as, health, economics, poverty, and children (Kunz & Sykes, 2007, p. 12).

To actively engage with the community in a meaningful manner people must have knowledge of and access to services, programs, and other supports in all spheres of the civil society. Language is a powerful tool of communication, meaning-making, and socialization (Kalbach & Kalbach, 1995; Saleebey, 2001). Caidi and Allard (2005) recommend that settlement services or immigrant serving agencies must work with community libraries to facilitate access of information to newcomers. The Grand Erie study clearly highlighted that service providers and social workers from various community agencies must collaborate and find ways to increase newcomers’ knowledge of community services, such as, where to go if they were discriminated at work. *The Conversation Café*, at the City of Brantford Public Library has met with some success in engaging newcomers in dialogues about their integration and in providing newcomers opportunities for information and social exchange. The launch of the Grand Erie Local Immigrant Partnership (LIP), a Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) initiative to build welcoming and inclusive communities, is a step in the positive direction towards fostering the full participation of newcomers in this region especially in the remote counties. The new website of Workforce Planning Board of Grand Erie (<http://www.workforceplanningboard.org>) explains that a critical goal of LIP’s is to work with local stakeholders to disseminate information about community groups to immigrants especially those residing in the rural areas of Grand Erie.

Having argued for the need to provide knowledge of community services to newcomers, as an anti-oppressive researcher, it must be emphasized that service providers need to regard immigrants and refugees as “independent adults who may need information and guidance in initial settlement, but would eventually be able to decide for themselves what their goals of settlements are and select, as opposed to being directed to, the services needed to meet their goals” (Sakamoto, 2007, p. 528).

It is encouraging to note that most of the newcomers in this study felt *connected* or expressed “the sense of belonging, membership, and personal involvement” (Hombrados-Mendieta, Gomez-Jacinto, & Dominguez-Fuentes, 2009, p. 672) to their ethnic community. This connectedness may be the outcome of the relentless efforts of the local immigrant elders to create a space of worship, celebration, and spirituality where people can gather and perform cultural rituals and ceremonies. For example, every Friday men, women, children, and youth from the Muslim community come together in the holy mosque to dialogue, heal, consult, and mingle. Members of the larger community are also invited to partake in the festivities after the prayer. The Sikh community meets in the gurudwara (Sikh temple), where women cook together, sing praises, and then the community dines after the prayer ceremony. The immigrant/refugee community from India does not yet have a temple but have begun to commune in community halls on religious occasions. These religious gatherings seem to foster ethnic connectedness. Kalbach and Kalbach’s (1995) work is relevant here they found that foreign-born European and non-European immigrants who were involved with their traditional ethnic churches were more likely to retain their ethnic language and show a stronger ethnic connection than those who identified with Canadian churches or were not affiliated with any church at all.

While it is important for newcomers to feel connected to their ethnic community the newcomers' relationship with the host community, it is also critical for their economic, health, and social integration (Berry, 1997). Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind, Jaakkola, and Reuter (2006) study provides evidence that when immigrants are actively interacting with host support networks (members of the larger community) they are less likely to experience psychological stress. It is through their social contacts with ethnic networks in the host community and host support networks that newcomers learn about the host society’s culture, custom, value system, policies, and gather other information that is integral for their integration (Fong & Ooka, 2006). In light of these findings it is troubling to note that less than half (44%) of the newcomers and slightly over half (51%) of the service providers in Grand Erie reported that newcomers were connected to the host society on which they depended for their integration. Regarding the quantitative and qualitative findings on discrimination against newcomers in Grand Erie in the current study, it is not surprising that mostly newcomers do not feel connected to the host society. For example, newcomers and service providers at work, in the community or in the neighbourhood, identified discrimination. Even though 70% of service providers in Grand Erie were willing to assist with newcomer integration, it is confusing and worrisome that 23% were undecided on the issue and 8% were not willing to help. Further, the service provider's quote, “I feel very strong that those who wear turbans... men... discriminate against women of all nationalities and scare women by the way they act towards other people” is an example of “stereotyping” and “othering” members of visible minorities. Arguing from an anti-oppressive lens, Sakamoto (2007) challenges the traditional approach to settlement worker where immigrants and refugees are seen as ‘deficit’. She argues that

Anti-oppressive social work with immigrants would see immigrant service users as competent individuals with agency. Service providers would regard those utilizing immigrant services as co-learners and allies in the process of locating necessary services rather than seeing them as the dissimilar other (Sakamoto, 2007, p. 528).

A female newcomer's quote suggests that she had experienced discrimination *because of her dress – hijab/burkha*. Hoodfar (1992/1993) asserts that the dominant western culture continues to colonize women by equating veil with ignorance and oppression and as a result of these stereotypical views, veiled women are suffering the psychological and socio-economic consequences. Here, the person wearing the veil became the “outsider”, the “marginalized”, and the “stranger”. This interaction between the “veil” and “dominant eyes” was not mundane. It carried within its womb an opportunity for growth or annihilation. Put simply, the Grand Erie resident could have chosen to interact in a friendly and non-judgemental manner towards the immigrant woman promoting intercultural integration and assisting her to adapt to the host society. Unfortunately, the person chose to negatively judge the cultural ‘other’ perhaps having a detrimental effect on her whereby she may avoid any future interaction with members of the larger community fearing further experiences of discrimination (Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind, Jaakkola, & Reuter, 2006). It is important for individual and community health to recognize that immigrants' experience of discrimination “tend to decrease their psychological well-being, although the same experiences on the other hand induce them to increase their social interaction with friends and relatives living abroad” (Jasinskaja-Lahti et al., 2006, p. 307).

Aside from the survey's findings on discrimination against newcomers in Grand Erie, the 2008 data from Brantford Police Services that there has been a 50% increase in hate “incidents” in Brantford (Marco, 2008) is alarming. In addition, LIP's latest press release inviting residents of Grand Erie to become more welcoming to newcomers by participating in LIP's community action plan aimed towards newcomer integration received some alarming responses in the ‘Readers Comments’ section (Mein, 2012). In one such response the writer stated, “If they came from the middle-east, Brantford would be like Disneyland, lol. What, only 2 stabbings a week?” Through its annual *Peace and Diversity Forums*, Citizenship and Immigration funded project, the YMCA Immigrant Settlement Services (ISS) has actively engaged with residents of Grand Erie to educate them on issues of cultural diversity hoping to build an inclusive community. A local website has been recently created by the Peace and Diversity circle or working group (<http://celebratediversity.ca>) and it includes useful information on past forums. However, the data on discrimination of newcomers clearly highlights a need for agency/community investments in anti-racism and anti-discrimination education for service providers and community members to promote *equity* for *immigrants* through the elimination of *discrimination*. In light of the aforementioned racial tensions in Grand Erie, it is indeed encouraging to note that most of the newcomers in this survey suggested that they felt safe going to the police.

It is further intriguing that despite their financial difficulties and experiences of discrimination more than half (53%) of the newcomers were not planning to move out of Grand Erie. It may be because of the affordable housing in this area. For example, only 9% of the newcomers suggested *To find Better Housing* as a reason to relocate. Moreover, the City of Brantford is situated close to major highways that provide easy access to larger metropolitan

areas, such as, Toronto. Of those who responded that they were planning to relocate the most common responses for moving out of Grand Erie was to be closer to family, friends, or ethnic organizations and to find better employment opportunities. The service provider's survey revealed similar results. This finding isn't startling considering that most of the newcomers in this study are from collectivistic societies (India and China) and thrive on familial and community relationships. Larger metropolitan areas tend to have a well-established network of ethnic community, availability of diverse ethnic stores and places where immigrants can commune. Although in the last five years Grand Erie has become much more diverse in regards to the availability of ethnic cuisine, most of the community halls in this region have European membership. Ethnic and other multicultural events are largely held at community parks or office buildings depending upon the availability, climate, cost, and other such factors. Perhaps, a desire for a multicultural centre that was identified by newcomers in the qualitative and quantitative data represents their desire for belonging. A multicultural centre would embody a 'home' far away from home – a place they could call their own. It would be a place where different ethnic groups – men, women, and children – can commune free of the fear of discrimination. Aside from the social aspect it could be a place of cultural knowledge, sharing of information, healing, and building a relationship with the larger community. It could house ethnic artifacts, culture, art, and music that could impart cultural knowledge to the preceding generations about their language and heritage; it could be a place where families can build memories together. It is encouraging to see that Grand Erie has developed a number of community initiatives (for example, Mentorship Program) in its effort to adjust to the changing demographics and provide relevant services to newcomers (a full report of these initiatives can be found on the Workforce Planning Board of Grand Erie website <http://www.workforceplanningboard.org/>).

Social Work Practice with Newcomers and Social Justice

Despite social work's long history of serving the immigrant/refugee population in Canada, "there is a notable scarcity of social work research focused explicitly on newcomers to Canada and the specific challenges they may face" (Biles, Drover, Henley, Ibrahim, Lundy, & Yan, 2010, p. 6). Moreover, there is a growing concern that social workers are not equipped to provide informed, timely, and competent services to foster the newcomer's social, psychological and/or economic integration (Lundy, 2010). The recent publication of *Settlement of Newcomers to Canada* (2010) in *Canadian Social Work*, is a step in the positive direction towards understanding the myriad of settlement issues facing newcomers in Canada's urban and rural regions. However, much more attention is needed in the social work profession (curriculum and practise) so that social workers are able to address the complex issues of newcomer integration in the urban and rural settlement/host societies. Referring to Social Work Code of Ethics, Solas (2008) convincingly argues that social workers have ethical responsibilities to recognize diversity, distribute resources equitably, and to challenge negative discrimination and "social conditions that contribute to social exclusion, stigmatization, or subjugation, and to work towards an inclusive society" (p. 817). Quin (2009) asserts that:

Part of our learning and practice as social justice educators is to perpetually seek nurturing and sustainable mechanisms that facilitate ways to overcome and withstand historical and current oppressive internalization within a society that continues to reinvent and reinforce social inequality (p. 111).

However, what does social equality/inequality and social justice mean in the context of increasing ethnic diversity? A close examination of newcomers' experiences of discrimination in the Grand Erie study do not resonate with the philosophy of the Canadian Multiculturalism Policy that prides itself in promoting the full participation of newcomers in the social, political, and economic spheres of Canada (Kunz & Sykes, 2007). On the point of social equality, Solas (2008) makes an interesting argument that social workers must work with the political conviction that equality must be accorded to every individual not because of the virtue that people are equal, but by recognizing the significant inequalities that exist between human beings. It is only then that social work can seek an egalitarian form of social justice. It is my contention that while it is important to validate the differences between people, we must also recognize the thread of humanity that binds us together as human beings. Most people, regardless of their background, country of origin or colour of our skin, desire love, peace, and an opportunity to achieve their full potential. Given social work's colonial and Eurocentric histories, it is integral that in their research and practise with newcomers in a pluralistic society, social workers work from an anti-oppressive lens, are reflective of their taken-for-granted assumptions, biases and examine the ways in which they create research knowledge (Doyle & George, 2008; Morley, 2008). Social work academy must, for instance, exert deliberate efforts to increase diversity amongst its faculty and student body as well as diversify its curriculum so that it can graduate students who are competent practitioners capable of transformative and empowering practice and research at the micro and macro levels (Doyle & George, 2008; Morley, 2008).

Concluding Thoughts

The multifaceted nature of factors contributing to newcomer integration require a collaboration between immigrants/refugees, social workers, service providers, researchers, and government officials. We must together confront the reality of racism and discrimination in the resettlement of newcomers locally and globally in their host countries. Domestically and internationally, social workers can make a significant difference in eradicating inequalities both at through multiple paths: policy development, advocacy, research, academia, front-line grassroots activism, administration, and government. Contending with Coates (2003), the social work profession, with its history of preventative efforts and knowledge of human suffering, is equipped to bring about local and global transformation. It is important to recognize that "No dimension of equality – cultural, economic, political or social – is more fundamental than the others. Anything less would ultimately be liable to justify the replacement of one form of inequality with another" (Solas, 2008, p. 821).

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