A BMRC RESEARCH DIGEST
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Stalled Mobility:Income Inequality and Intergenerational Relationships

Among South Asian and Chinese Households in York Region

Credit : Getty Images/Stockphoto

What you need to know

Many immigrants encounter economic insecurity during settlement in Canada that often contributes to considerable strains and stresses within their families.. These challenges may be exacerbated by generational differences, such as grandparents' and adult children's different perceptions of how children should integrate into their new country and retain cultural knowledge and tradition. Simultaneously, families provide enormous sources of support and act as buffers against financial insecurity , systemic racism, and gender inequities.

What is this research about?

Our research explores how immigrant youth, adults and senior Chinese and South Asians in York Region use family relations and multigenerational households to tackle the material, social and cultural settlement challenges they face. For example, racial discrimination depresses wages for youth and adults; meanwhile, seniors rely on adult children and grandchildren for material survival, or vice versa. Cultural norms and traditions shaping family roles, practices, and expectations tend to disproportionately assign domestic responsibilities to women of all ages.

How was the research carried out?

Participants were recruited through a range of methods including use of social networks and social media like Reddit, Instagram, snowball sampling, and personal contacts, and at various locations (e.g. places of worship such as temples, churches, mosques; community organizations). The South Asian participants include: 10 Seniors; 8 Adults; and 15 Youth. The Chinese participants include: 10 Seniors; 10 Adults; and 19 Youths. Between May 2019 and May 2020, in-depth interviews were conducted with 33 South Asian participants and 39 Chinese participants, in person or by telephone.

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What have we learned from the research?

Youth, adults and seniors face different but overlapping settlement challenges

• Youth, including international students, face challenges with navigating the school system and finding part-time employment, in addition to experiencing loneliness, isolation, and depression.

• Adults, usually mothers, struggle to find adequate child care. Adults also experience credentialism and anxiety over the well-being of their families.

• Seniors find it difficult to access information and healthcare. Many seniors rely on their adult children for emotional, financial, and instrumental support. South Asian seniors are more likely than Chinese seniors to be dependent on their adult children.

Families help immigrants settle

• Multigenerational and extended families serve as both sources of emotional, financial, and instrumental support and stress for every age group and in every stage of settlement.

• Youth, adults, and seniors are less likely to rely on formal and informal settlement services, and more likely to rely on family, friends, and communities for information and help in navigating life in Canada.

The risk of economic insecurity remains paramount

• Youth, including international students, face high tuition fees, inadequate government financial support, difficulty transitioning to full-time employment, and high costs of living.

• Adults struggle to find stable full-time employment commensurate with their educational credentials and work experience. They remain concentrated in racialized, precarious, and low-paying “survival jobs”.

• Seniors’ limited resources and lack of access to government income supports leave them dependent on adult children.

How can you use this research?

Policymakers, professionals, government officials, and civil society groups could use this research to better understand 1) how youth, adults, and senior immigrants encounter settlement challenges, 2) how they activate individual and family resources to enhance their resilience in facing these challenges, and 3) how, despite these resources, economic precarity continues.

Who is leading this research?

Professor Nancy Mandell (mandell@yorku.ca), Professor Amber Gazso (agazso@yorku.ca), Professor Guida Man (gman@yorku.ca) & Professor Larry Lam (larrylam@yorku.ca) of York University led this research.

Learn more

For more information, please visit https://bmrc-irmu.info.yorku.ca/stalled-mobility-income-inequality-and-intergenerational-relationships-among-newcomer-south-asian-and-chinese-households-in-york-region-2/