

Study on Parenting Issues of Newcomer Families in Ontario



Waterloo Region Findings

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| | | |
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Waterloo Region Findings

Introduction

This report documents the processes and findings of an eight-month research study on parenting issues of newcomer families in Ontario. Funded by the Ontario Administration of Settlement and Integration Services (OASIS), the study was carried out by the Centre for Research and Education in Human Services (CREHS) and the Joint Centre for Excellence for Research on Immigration and Settlement (CERIS) and their partners.

While the study was provincial in scope, this report outlines the process and findings of the focus groups conducted in Waterloo Region by the Centre for Research and Education in Human Services. It begins by describing the overall provincial study: its background, framework purpose, research approach, structure, and methodology. The remainder of the report focuses on the research conducted in Waterloo Region, describing the methodology and findings. The report ends with conclusions and recommendations specifically for Waterloo Region.

Overview of the Provincial Study

Background

In 1999 the Ontario Administration of Settlement and Integration Services (OASIS) funded seven research studies to examine the needs of newcomer youth in Ontario. Focus groups with parents identified the need to look at parenting issues that newcomer families face when coming to Canada. Findings showed that, in many instances, the Canadian legal and cultural expectations associated with parenting differed from the child upbringing practices in the newcomer families' previous home country.

Based on these results OASIS issued another call for proposals in June 2000, to further explore the issues of immigrant parenting. The Centre for Research and Education in Human Services (CREHS) submitted a proposal in partnership with the Joint Centre for Excellence for Research on Immigration and Settlement (CERIS) and their partners, Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI) and Multicultural History Society of Ontario (MHSO). On behalf of the partnership team, the Centre for Research and Education in Human Services (CREHS) was contracted by OASIS to complete the research between August 2000 and March 2001.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this provincial research study was to explore the issues faced by immigrant parents within diverse ethnic backgrounds. The research also explored the supports and resources that could assist newcomer parents in addressing their parenting issues.

The objectives of the study were to:

- Explore the parenting beliefs and aspirations of newcomers within various ethnic groups (i.e., **parenting orientations**), and how these are put into practice (i.e., **parenting styles**).
- Explore the new parenting perspectives newcomer parents encounter when coming to Canada (i.e., **Canadian context**).
- Explore how newcomer parents have begun to adjust to their new context by making changes to their parenting strategies and relationships with their children (i.e., **modifications**).
- Explore the existing and needed types of supports and resources that help newcomer families adapt to their new Canadian context (i.e., **supports**).
- Explore how newcomer parents can contribute to other parents in Canada (i.e., **contributions**).
- Provide concrete recommendations for future action.

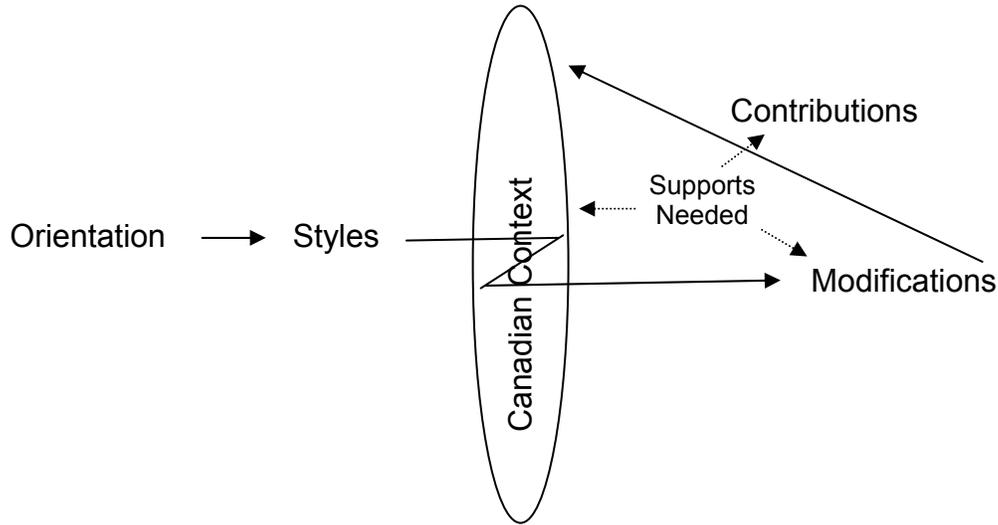
This exploratory study considered the perspectives of newcomer mothers and fathers who have been in Canada for less than three years, as well as key informants from various sectors. The study compared findings across twelve language groups, and across three distinct age groups of children (0-5, 6-13 and 14-18). It also explored differences and similarities among three urban communities (Toronto-large, Ottawa-medium and Waterloo-small) across the province.

Framework for Understanding Immigrant Parenting

Understanding parenting issues is complex. It is even more complex in the context of immigration. The danger of developing any framework about immigrant parenting is in its oversimplification of this parenting process. The diagram below shows what we have come to see as the main components of immigrant parenting (note that each main component corresponds to one of the study's objectives).

The framework for understanding issues of immigrant parenting was developed by the study team after an initial review of parenting literature. It was later refined by the analysis of data collected through the study. As such, the framework builds on existing parenting models but it greatly expands and adapts these models into the immigrant context.

A Framework for Understanding Immigrant Parenting



The framework begins with *parenting orientations*. Orientations are the beliefs, biases and values that form a parent’s expectations for their children’s behaviours and hopes for their children’s futures. Parenting orientations include the values parents want to pass on to their children (what makes a “good” child), the qualities that parents should adopt (what makes a “good” parent), and the aspirations or future goals parents have for their children.

Parenting styles are the implementation of parenting orientations. Parenting styles include the ways that parents relate to and interact with their children. In other words, parenting styles are how people go about doing parenting; how they shape their children and the relationships they build with them.

The *Canadian context* is an intervention, or filter, potentially impacting the parenting orientations and parenting styles of newcomers. As new Canadians, immigrant parents have entered into a new context. Our interest in this study was to understand what immigrant parents perceive to be the Canadian way of parenting. These ways of parenting might be similar or different to the ones that they themselves hold.

Parenting modifications are the changes that immigrants make in their parenting orientation and styles as a result of living within the Canadian context. When people move to a new place, they often find that they have to adjust to new ways that are different from their home country. The participants in this study have lived in Canada for three years or less. This relatively short period of time limited the understanding of parenting modifications that might be made over a longer period of time.

Parenting contributions are those ways in which immigrants contribute to an understanding and practice of parenting within Canada. The immigrant settlement process has frequently been described as a reciprocal relationship between immigrants

and the host society (e.g., Bourhis, 2000). This “two-way street” understanding of settlement acknowledges that immigrants not only adapt to their new home, but that they also influence and shape this society.

The final component in our framework deals with the *parenting supports* available and needed for immigrant parents. We will argue that parenting supports are needed to help immigrant parents understand and settle within their new Canadian context, to help them through the process of parenting modifications, and to help encourage mutual exchange around parenting issues between immigrants and other Canadians.

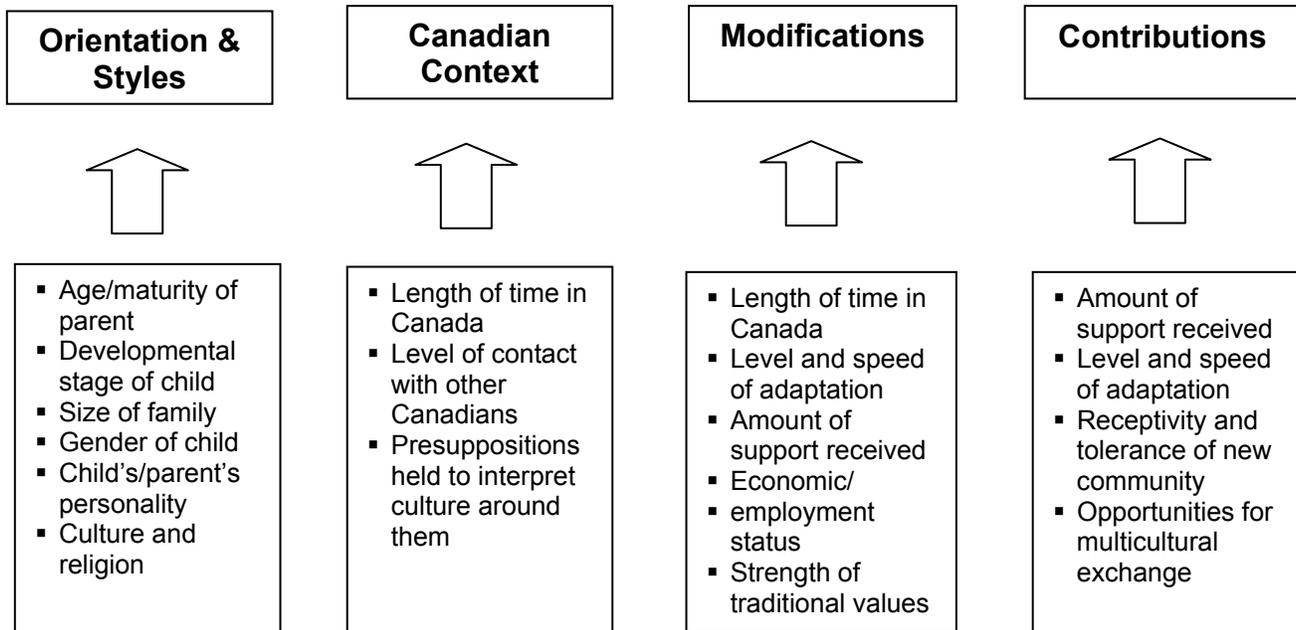
The diagram below shows how each of the main components described above are influenced by contextual factors. Understanding immigrant parenting requires such a dynamic model that acknowledges that perspectives differ across cultures and across individuals, even within similar cultures. These perspectives also change as individuals and groups evolve over time through contact with other influences.

So, for example, newcomer parents may have very different parenting orientations and styles depending on such factors as their maturity as a parent, the number, age, gender and personalities of their children, as well as their cultural and religious backgrounds. When coming to Canada, immigrants may perceive the Canadian context differently. These perceptions are influenced by such factors as how long they have lived here, how much contact they have with other Canadians outside of their own cultural group, and the worldview or presuppositions they hold that help them to interpret the world around them.

Similarly, there are influences determining to what extent individual immigrants modify their ways of parenting. Examples could include their length of time in Canada, how quickly they adapt to Canadian society, the amount of support they receive as parents, the economic stability of the family, and the strength of their traditional cultural and religious values.

Finally there are factors influencing to what extent individual newcomers are able to contribute to the understanding and practice of parenting within Canada. Examples of these are also listed in the diagram below.

Factors Influencing the Components of Immigrant Parenting



Research Approach

This study used **qualitative** methods to gain rich and deep insights concerning the knowledge and practices newcomer families employ with respect to parenting and child rearing. It allowed parents to tell their stories and thereby captured parents' experiences within and across ethno-specific groups. The use of a triangulation of methods that includes conducting key informant interviews, focus groups, and individual interviews strengthened the credibility of the study (Patton, 1990).

The study also used a **participatory** and **action-oriented** research methodology (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nelson, Ochocka, Griffin & Lord, 1998). By this we mean that the project involved, in various ways, the groups of people who have a stake in the issue of immigrant parenting (i.e., immigrant parents, family support programs and immigrant service providers). The research partners and steering committee members will oversee the research process, review all written summaries and reports, and develop recommendations. All research participants will receive feedback (written or oral) of project findings.

Collaborative Structure

This research study was a collaborative effort among several partners. It was an example of a successful partnering of an independent community research organization, academics (from two Universities), and non-profit organizations.

CREHS and CERIS were the lead organizations for the project. Joanna Ochocka and Rich Janzen from CREHS, and Kenise Murphy Kilbride and Paul Anisef from CERIS were the principal investigators. Both lead organizations contracted and hired researchers to carry out the research tasks under their responsibility.

The CREHS research team

The Centre for Research and Education in Human Services (CREHS) is an independent, not-for-profit organization established in 1982. Located in Kitchener, Ontario, CREHS is overseen by a board of directors that includes academics, service providers, and consumers of health and social services. CREHS is a leader in participatory action research in Canada. It brings this leadership into its work on immigrant settlement and family support issues. CREHS's strength is in being able to meaningfully involve stakeholder groups in order to work toward a common purpose.

In addition to the primary investigators (Joanna Ochocka and Rich Janzen), the CREHS research team consisted of a Project Manager (Purnima Sundar), a graduate practicum student (Christina Fuller) and sixteen research assistants hired to recruit and conduct focus groups and feedback sessions.

The CERIS research team

The Joint Centre for Excellence for Research on Immigration and Settlement (CERIS) was established in March of 1996 to study the settlement of immigrants into the economic, social, political and cultural life of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). The purpose of its establishment by federal funds is to provide governments and non-governmental organizations with information that will enable them to design and implement the most useful policies in areas related to immigration and settlement. With centres in Montreal, Edmonton, and Vancouver, CERIS is a major component of Canada's participation in the international Metropolis Project.

In addition to the primary investigators, Kenise Murphy Kilbride (Ryerson Polytechnic University) and Paul Anisef (York University), CERIS employed a Project Manager (Etta Anisef) and additional researchers including: Vappu Tyyska (Ryerson Polytechnic University), Mehrunissa Ali (Ryerson Polytechnic University), Amina Malko and Laura Maniago (Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants) and Lillian Petroff (The Multicultural History Society of Ontario).

A large number of research assistants were also involved on the CERIS team. Twenty-four research assistants were hired by OCASI in Toronto and another 12 in Ottawa to conduct focus group interviews and individual interviews. MHSO recruited another five

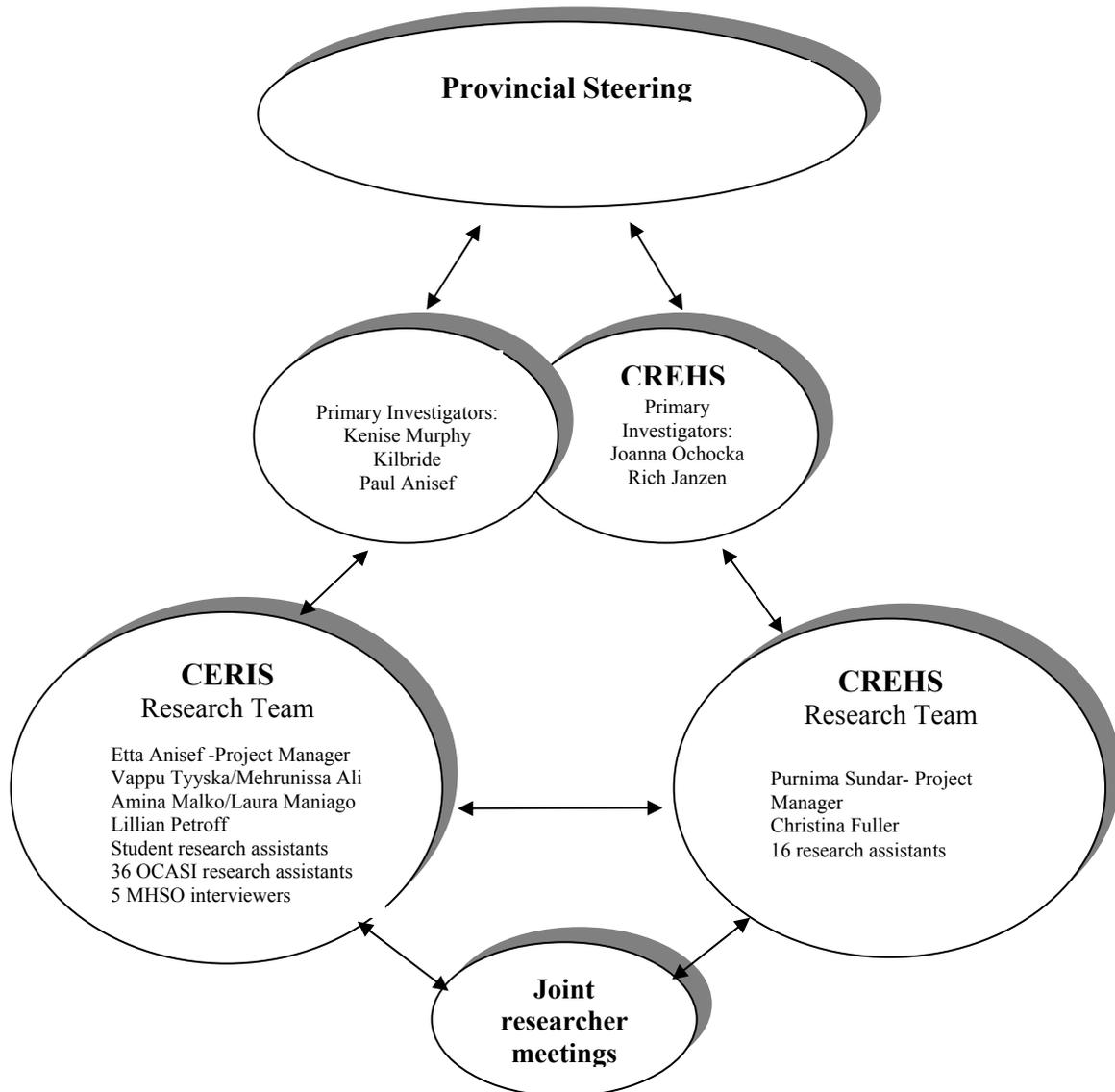
interviewers to conduct key informant interviews. Student research assistants were also hired at York and Ryerson Universities to conduct the literature review and for data analysis.

Stakeholder based committee

The research project was overseen by a nine-member stakeholder based committee. The role of the stakeholder steering committee was to provide overall guidance to the project and to develop the study's final recommendations.

This committee met three times during the life of the project. Two face-to-face meetings were held; once near the beginning of the project, and once near the end. A tele-conference was also held during the middle of the project. The committee consisted of the perspectives listed below. Names of steering committee members are listed in the appendix.

Structure of Project



Overall Research Methodology

A variety of qualitative methods were used to gather information in the three study sites across the province. These methods are summarized below.

Literature review

A postdoctoral student undertook an extensive review of the literature on cross-cultural parenting issues, and specifically on parenting issues related to the identified ethnic groups. The review included scholarly, and government and community-based literature within and outside of Canada. The literature review also helped to refine the interview instruments for subsequent stages of the research.

Key informant interviews

A total of 24 interviews were held in Toronto, Ottawa and Waterloo. The purpose of the key informant interviews was to understand the main parenting issues immigrants face and their existing supports from the perspective of service providers, academics and policy makers.

Key informants were identified by the project partners and by the steering committee. Efforts were made to recruit participants from a variety of perspectives: legal, health and mental health, education, welfare, family support, and settlement.

Focus groups with parents

A total of 50 focus groups were held in three sites across Ontario (Toronto, Ottawa, and Waterloo). Half of these groups were with mothers only, and the other half with fathers only. Each focus group was held with one of the twelve targeted language groups, and included parents with children ranging in age from infancy to 18 years old. Efforts were made to recruit parents with children of varying ages.

A total of 24 interviews were held in Toronto, two for each language group in the study (one with mothers and one with fathers). Another 14 groups were held in Waterloo (representing mother and father groups in 7 languages) and 12 in Ottawa (representing mother and father groups in 6 languages). All 12 language groups were represented across Ottawa and Waterloo. Although facilitators fluent in the identified language conducted the interviews, all interview findings were subsequently summarized into English for analysis.

The purpose of the focus groups was to understand the main parenting issues immigrants face and their existing supports from the perspective of immigrant mothers and fathers. Two pilot groups (one with Polish mothers, one with Polish fathers) were held to test the protocol. Protocol questions matched the objectives of the study and included questions about:

- parenting orientation (beliefs and values)
- parenting styles (putting beliefs and values into practice)

- Canadian context (similarities and differences in parenting between home and new country)
- modification (parenting and family relationship changes since coming to Canada)
- parenting supports needed and used by immigrant parents
- contributions of immigrant parents to other Canadian families.

Focus group participants were recruited in two ways. Some participants were recruited through local service providers, while others were recruited through less formal networks. Informal recruitment strategies included the facilitators' own networks within their community, friends and family of participants, ethnic businesses, advertisement in media, ethnic clubs/associations, places of worship etc.

Distribution of Focus Groups Across Toronto, Ottawa and Waterloo Region¹

| Toronto | Ottawa | Waterloo Region |
|-----------------------------|------------------|-----------------------------|
| China-Mandarin | | China-Mandarin |
| China- Cantonese | China- Cantonese | |
| Sri Lanka-Tamil | Sri Lanka-Tamil | |
| India- Gujarati | | India- Punjabi |
| India-Punjabi | India- Gujarati | |
| Filipino-Tagalog | Filipino-Tagalog | |
| Afghanistan-Pashtu or Dari | | Afghanistan-Pashtu or Dari |
| Iran-Farsi | | Iran-Farsi |
| Central America-Spanish | | Central America-Spanish |
| Somalia-Somali | Somalia-Somali | Somalia-Somali |
| Russia-Russian | Russia-Russian | |
| Former Yugo.-Serbo-Croatian | | Former Yugo.-Serbo-Croatian |
| N=24 | N=12 | N=14 |

¹Two focus groups were held for a given language in each site; one with mothers only, the other with fathers only.

Individual in-depth interviews with parents

In order to achieve greater insight into any differences among the three children age cohorts (0-5, 6-13, 14-18), a total of 48 individual interviews were held with parents in Toronto. Parents were those who had been most insightful about the issues pertaining to the specific age groups in the focus groups. Protocols were developed after focus groups were held.

Three interviews of mothers per ethnic group were conducted, one for each age cohort. This was done on the assumption that mothers work more closely with children and will have more details of parenting experiences to share. Fathers, however, have serious parenting concerns as well, even if they are not so extensively and intensively involved in parenting. Therefore one father per ethnic group was interviewed. This father was one who had at least one child aged 15 or older, so that the parenting issues of all ages of children were reported on at least retrospectively. Because gender-specific issues were important to the research, parents selected for the individual interviews were those with both sons and daughters.

Summary of Information Gathering Methods

| Method | Perspectives | Scope |
|--------------------------|---|---|
| Literature Reviews | Academics Policy makers | International review |
| Key Informant Interviews | Academics Policy makers | Semi-structured interviews in Ottawa (7), Toronto (12) and Waterloo (5) |
| Focus Group Interviews | Mothers and fathers from 12 language groups | 150 groups in Ottawa (12), Toronto (24) and Waterloo (14). Half fathers, half mothers |
| Individual Interviews | Mothers and fathers from 12 language groups | 48 interviews in Toronto (36 mothers and 12 fathers) 1 interviewer |

Background to Waterloo Region

Waterloo Region has a diverse, and growing immigrant population. In the 1990's the growth of immigrants has kept pace with the population growth of the entire region. According to Statistics Canada, 21% of residents in the region were immigrants in 1991. This remained consistent to 1996 where, despite a growth in the regional population, statistics show that again 21% of residents were immigrants. Fifteen percent of these immigrants were recent immigrants, having arrived within the previous five years (i.e., since 1991). An unusually high proportion (approximately one-third) of these immigrants are refugees.

Waterloo Region has a history of supporting immigrants to settle in their new home. For example, agencies exist which provide settlement information, orientation and non-professional counseling for immigrants, interpretation and translation, language testing and referral, and employment services. In addition to these formal services, many informal supports for newcomers to the area exist through churches and other community groups.

Research Methodology in Waterloo Region

Fourteen focus groups were held in seven different languages in Waterloo Region. Half of the focus groups were held with mothers only, and half with fathers only. Efforts were made to recruit parents with children of various ages (i.e., 0-5, 6-12, 13-18). Each focus group was conducted in one of the identified languages, and the findings were translated by facilitators into English for analysis. Two pilot groups (one with Polish mothers, one with Polish fathers) were held to test the focus group protocol.

Hiring the Facilitators

CREHS regularly hires (and trains) community members as researchers in various projects. A leader in empowering research, CREHS believes that community-based research projects are an opportunity to build capacity within local communities.

For this project, individuals with a background in social or health sciences, and with strong verbal and written skills in both English and one other language (i.e., Mandarin, Punjabi/Gujurati, Pashtu/Dari, Farsi, Somali, Serbo-Croatian, or Spanish) were invited to apply for the position of "focus group facilitator". In addition to possessing effective interpersonal and facilitation skills, applicants were required to show that they were familiar with a local ethnic community speaking one of the above languages. Job advertisements were circulated to several immigrant-serving agencies as well as to our local universities, churches, and ethno-specific community organizations.

One woman and one man from each of the language groups were hired to facilitate a focus group with immigrant mothers and fathers respectively. Facilitators were individuals who wrote and spoke both their mother tongue and English, and who had

developed many formal and informal connections to other members of their particular ethnic community.

Training the Facilitators

Facilitators were required to attend two separate training sessions which lasted approximately three hours each. Mothers' facilitators and fathers' facilitators of a particular language group were trained together, and were encouraged to and work together in recruiting participants. In addition to providing support to one another, individuals were assured that they would receive ongoing support from the project manager throughout all phases of their involvement in the study.

The training consisted of providing facilitators with an overview of the project, followed by a description of their roles and responsibilities. The group brainstormed about ideas on how to recruit potential participants, and were led in a discussion around ethics and confidentiality. Facilitators also received instruction on how to go about running a focus group, and heard about the experiences of one of the leaders of the pilot focus group.

Recruiting the Participants

Facilitators were required to recruit between eight and ten participants who had been in Canada for three years or less, and who had children in at least two of the three different age groups (i.e., 0-5 years, 6-11 years, and 12-18 years) to take part in each focus group. People were encouraged to seek potential participants by using both their informal and formal contacts.

Most facilitators began their search by tapping into their existing social networks. They asked friends and family members if they themselves would like to participate, or if they knew of others who might be interested. This often extended into involving other active members of ethnic communities like religious or spiritual leaders, or owners of businesses catering to specific cultural groups (e.g., ethnic food stores) by asking them to suggest names of potential participants. In some cases, where these relatively direct methods did not work, facilitators made tried more creative ways of reaching their ethnic community. For example, in an effort to reach Central American fathers, the facilitator made announcements on the local Spanish-speaking radio station.

In addition to these more informal ways of recruiting participants, several facilitators went through organizations or programs serving immigrant populations. Despite the more "formal" nature of these methods, facilitators approached potential participants relatively informally. For example, two facilitators met routinely with newcomers as a part of their job, and spoke with them about the project in that way. Others discussed the study with ESL teachers with whom they had studied, asking them to suggest potential participants.

What Worked Well

Facilitators found using their existing social networks as a base from which to either draw or locate potential participants very useful. Talking to friends, family, and religious and community leaders helped to enlarge the pool of individuals who might have been interested in participating in the study, and increased awareness about these issues in general.

Working with their language partner was another productive strategy used by many facilitators. When, for example, a mothers' facilitator successfully recruited a participant for her focus group, she would suggest to her language partner that he recruit her husband. Alternatively, the two facilitators would approach families together to recruit couples to participate.

In trying to engage potential participants and build trust, facilitators found it useful to create informal relationships with mothers and fathers. Facilitators went to the homes of potential participants to visit, or spoke at length on the phone with them about things other than the research study (i.e., how they were adjusting to Canada, sharing their own experiences as a newcomer, etc.). Facilitators would then discuss the study in general terms, emphasize the benefits of taking part in the research, (e.g., meeting new people, sharing experiences, helping other newcomers, etc.), and then invite them to participate in the focus group. Developing this type of casual rapport with potential participants allowed newcomers to feel connected to the facilitator, and gave them time to get used to the idea of taking part in the research.

Challenges

One of the biggest challenges faced by facilitators was the shortage of potential participants in certain immigrant groups. In Waterloo Region, low numbers in particular newcomer groups made it difficult to seek these individuals out and/or encourage them to take part in this study. For example, it was difficult for facilitators to find participants who were from Central America. In these cases, despite all of their efforts (e.g., making announcements on the local ethnic radio station, speaking with church groups, etc.), the number of individuals who met the criteria for participation remained at a low level.

In some cases, newcomers were reluctant to participate due to a lack of trust in the research process. Either they themselves had had bad experiences with research participation, or they had heard stories from other community members who had similar experiences. This distrust of research stemmed from the fact that when having been invited to take part in community initiatives or research on previous occasions, they felt that their presence was for symbolic purposes only, and that their input was not valued. In short, they felt that taking part in this study would be a waste of their time. Facilitators who came upon this as an obstacle in their recruitment worked hard to emphasize the participatory, action-oriented nature of the project, and assured them that sharing their experiences and ideas would benefit both themselves and their ethnic community.

Once people had agreed to take part in the study, they were sent information about the Centre for Research and Education, a letter welcoming them to the project, a consent

form, and demographic form that was to be completed. All of these documents had been translated into their particular language. In some instances, participants were intimidated by the number of forms they had to fill out, the types of questions, and/or had difficulties in understanding these items due to differences within each language. In such cases, facilitators went over these forms with participants in person, clarifying the questions in order to help them respond, and emphasizing that confidentiality would be maintained at all times.

Facilitators were often concerned that participants who agreed to take part in the study would simply not show up for the focus group meeting. In order to ensure their presence, facilitators maintained regular contact with newcomers. In addition to confirming their attendance, this allowed facilitators to answer any questions participants might have, and more importantly, this helped to build rapport. Once again, facilitators found that creating a relationship with participants increased the probability that the latter would not withdraw their participation at the last moment.

Description of Participants

In total 84 participants took part in these focus groups. The breakdown of mothers and fathers in each language group is as follows:

| Language Group | Number of Mothers | Number of Fathers | Total Number |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|
| Mandarin (China) | 9 | 9 | 18 |
| Pashtu/Dari (Afghanistan) | 8 | 8 | 16 |
| Somali (Somalia) | 7 | 6 | 13 |
| Farsi (Iran) | 7 | 5 | 12 |
| Serbo-Croatian (former Yugoslavia) | 5 | 5 | 10 |
| Latin America (Mexico, Cuba, Columbia, Costa Rica) | 5 | 5 | 8 |
| Punjabi (India) | 4 | 3 | 7 |
| Total | 45 | 41 | 86 |

The average time that the participants had been in Canada was approximately 1 year and 4 months, with the least amount of time being 2 months and the greatest amount of time being just over 3 years. Two thirds of the participants knew at least one person in the country upon arrival.

Many participants had immigrant status upon entry into Canada (43%), while others had refugee status (41%). A small number of those taking part in focus groups were refugee claimants (5%), and 10% of participants had other, non-specified entry statuses.

With regard to participants' levels of education, 10% had attended graduate school, 33% had attained a college or university degree, and 33% had completed high school. Over

half of the participants (54%) are currently attending school in Canada, either in university or college programs, or as students in ESL classes.

Fifty-two of the parents in this study indicated their ages on the demographic forms. Of these participants, half of them were between the ages of 30-39, 27% were in the 40-49 age range, 14% were between 20-29, and finally 10% were above the age of 50.

The size and membership of the participants' families were quite varied. This study focused on parents with children in three distinct age categories: birth to 5 years old, 6-13 years old, and 13-18 years old. Thirty-six percent of the parents in this study had at least one child in the birth to 5 years old category, 74% of parents had at least one child between the ages of 6-13, and 33% of participants had at least one child in her/his teen years (i.e., 13-18).

Some of the participants had children in more than one of the different age groupings and could therefore contribute to discussions around experiences with children from a variety of age perspectives. One third of the participants had children in two of the three different age groups (30%) and a small number of participants had children in all three groups (6%). Almost two thirds of the participants had children in only one of the age categories (64%). Sixteen out of the eighteen Mandarin participants had only one child, which distinguished this group from the other language groups.

Conducting the Focus Groups

These fourteen focus group meetings took place over a period of two months, and were conducted in seven different languages. Most of these sessions occurred over the weekend, either on Friday evening, or during the day on Saturday or Sunday. With the exception of one focus group, the project manager attended each session in order to provide support to facilitators, and to meet and welcome participants.

The location of the meeting was determined by facilitators based upon what seemed to work best for each group. Some sessions occurred in someone's home, others at the Centre for Research and Education. A third option was used by one group. Punjabi mothers and fathers met at the Sikh Temple after services on Sunday morning.

After each focus group interview had taken place, both the project manager and each facilitator made fieldnotes describing her/his observations about the meeting. These impressions were discussed in further detail during a debriefing session between each facilitator and the project manager that took place shortly thereafter. Once all focus groups had been completed, facilitators were brought together to discuss their thoughts and ideas about the content and process of their meetings as a group. Mothers' and fathers' facilitators met separately.

What Worked Well

The majority of focus groups were well attended by participants. Facilitators were, for the most part, successful in recruiting newcomers, and ensuring their attendance at each meeting. Once people arrived at the focus group meeting, participants found the topic of

discussion very interesting and personally relevant, and had much to contribute. Those who took part in each focus group, therefore, shared a great deal during each meeting.

Regardless of where the focus group took place, arranging transportation for participants from their homes to the meeting location was key in ensuring their attendance. In some cases, facilitators organized it such that participants who lived close together would come together, and in other instances, the facilitator her/himself or the project manager did the driving. In addition to overcoming the barrier of transportation, having the driving arranged decreased the anxiety that participants might have felt if arriving at the meeting location alone.

Childcare was another issue that may have prevented potential participants from attending the focus group meeting. In order to deal with this, participants who required paid childcare received money to be used towards covering the cost of a babysitter. In one particularly creative instance, the facilitator of the fathers group arranged for his wife to look after the participants' children in their home so that Afghan mothers and fathers could meet on the same morning at the Centre for Research and Education.

In most cases, facilitators took a few moments at the beginning of the meeting to chat informally with participants. This helped people to relax and become comfortable in the setting. For some, it was an opportunity to catch up with friends, and for others it was an opportunity to get to know each other. This time was also used by the facilitator to answer any questions and provide assistance to participants where necessary in filling out the consent or demographic forms.

Finally, to make the focus group experience enjoyable for participants, refreshments were offered during each meeting. Where possible, we provided ethnic foods specific to their particular group. In addition to this, an honorarium was also offered to mothers and fathers. Participants were quite pleased with the thought and efforts that were put into creating a welcoming environment for them.

Challenges

While the majority of groups were well attended, there was a low level of participation in one group. In particular, the Spanish-speaking mothers group originally consisted only of two participants. The facilitator, therefore, chatted informally with these two participants, and rescheduled the meeting for another day. The second meeting was slightly better attended (i.e., by three participants), and took place in one of the participants' homes rather than at the Centre for Research and Education.

The other challenge that facilitators encountered had to do with the duration of the meeting. While participants were told that each session would last between one and a half to two hours, meetings went for an average of three hours, with the longest being four and a half hours. Aside from the thought-provoking and emotional nature of the issues discussed, facilitators needed to be mindful of cultural issues that affected the length of the discussion. For example, in the Somali fathers group, the time for daily prayers arrived in the middle of their meeting. The facilitator in this case had to suspend

the discussion briefly to allow participants the time to carry out their prayers. In another case, the facilitator of the Afghan fathers group felt that participants would be offended if they were asked to shorten their responses. This facilitator, therefore, was caught between being mindful of the time, while also providing participants with the freedom to share their experiences without interruption. In most cases, however, participants found the discussions interesting and enjoyable, and were therefore not too concerned with the time.

Analysis and Feedback

Analysis

Once each focus group meeting had taken place, facilitators listened to the audio-tape of their group's discussion. Each facilitator took notes and summarized the content of the conversation. These notes were subsequently translated into English and were submitted to researchers for analysis.

The data from these summaries, descriptive and analytical notes taken by each facilitator, and fieldnotes taken by the project manager were organized according to certain categories. These categories were based on the main protocol questions and matched the objectives of the study:

- parenting orientation (beliefs and values)
- parenting styles (putting beliefs and values into practice)
- Canadian context (perceptions of similarities and differences in parenting between home and new country)
- modification (parenting and family relationship changes since coming to Canada)
- parenting supports needed and used by immigrant parents
- contributions of immigrant parents to other Canadian families.

Once the material had been organized this way, the data was coded in a way that looked at similar themes that emerged across groups. We also considered differences among participants along the following dimensions: language group, mother/father differences, aged cohort of children, child gender differences.

Feedback

In addition to summarizing the focus group data in report format (found in the next section below), we also fed back findings through a community forum. The forum was held on the evening of March 8, 2001, at Kitchener City Hall. All focus group participants were invited to attend this event, which was entitled "A Celebration of New Canadian Families". This event was also broadly advertised throughout the community.

The forum was co-sponsored by Citizenship and Immigration Canada, and three local organizations (Lutherwood/CODA, Canadian Mental Health Association, Community Health Department, Community Action Program for Children). The purpose of the forum was 1) to share the findings of this research, 2) to link newcomers, community members,

and service providers and to acquaint them with the services/supports available to them within the area, and 3) to celebrate the cultural diversity in Waterloo Region.

Over 300 people attended this successful three-hour event. Children's activities and entertainment, free multicultural food, and 22 agency resource displays were highlights of this event. The presentation of the research findings lasted approximately one hour, and forum participants and sponsors were given the opportunity to react to the presentation. A one page fact sheet of research findings was made available (in English as well as in eight other languages) to all forum participants.

Waterloo Region Focus Group Findings

Our discussion of the focus group findings follows the main categories of the immigrant parenting framework outlined at the beginning of this report.

Parenting Orientations

The first question to participants dealt with parenting orientations. Parenting orientations are the beliefs and hopes that guide parents as they raise their children. These include the values that form a parent's expectations for their children's behaviours, and the aspirations or future goals parents have for their children.

When talking about parenting orientations, focus group participants acknowledged the influence of own their parents. They shared personal stories about their parents when they were young. In most cases these stories showed how their own parents guided them as children. As one participant said, "My parents influenced me a lot to shape who I am today."

Often these stories included examples of positive values and parenting approaches they learned from their own parents. In these cases, parents wanted to pass on similar values to their own children. Consider the excerpt below.

When we were children our father used to make all the decisions for us even if we were married and had children of our own. He was the head of the family and he would listen to everyone, but the final decision would be his. In my case our father would ask us our opinion and try to guide us. He was a good friend and in the evening would make sure the whole family would dine together and talk about school, [and] what we did the whole day. He would even go and talk to our teacher to find out how we were progressing. –Punjabi father

Sometimes, however, participants shared stories of a different type. These accounts illustrated how participants wanted to be guided by different values in parenting than those used by their own parents.

One thing is for sure, I [do] not want my child to have the same childhood like I had. When we were young, academics meant everything. My parents were only concerned about school marks... A lot of us went through all the competition... The problem is that now a lot of us can't face failure. Some tragic stories have happened because of this....So, I would like my child to develop evenly in different subjects. I will allow her to go after her own interests. –Mandarin father

As the focus groups continued, the discussion shifted from the past to the present. Participants began to clarify the beliefs and values that guided them as parents today. They also began to articulate what dreams and aspirations they held for their children's future.

Guiding Beliefs and Values

Three main themes emerged about the guiding beliefs and values of parents. The first dealt with the value of respect, the second with the importance of the family, and the third with the passing of traditional religion and culture on to their children. While the themes of respect and family were common across all language groups, there were differences of opinions across groups on the significance of maintaining religion and culture.

Respect

The word translated as “respect” was repeated over and over again in the focus groups. Participants from all language groups talked about wanting their children to learn to be respectful to others. This included respecting their parents or “elders”, their teachers, their marital partner when they grew up, and other people in society. Being respectful was seen as foundational to what makes a good family member and a good citizen in general.

The word “respect” seemed to mean a number of things to participants. Usually it meant acknowledging and submitting to the authority of older people. For example, some felt that children should listen to their parents and teachers, not challenge their opinions, and do what they're told. In addition, they believed that children should address elders with formal titles such as “Uncle”.

Sometimes the word respect held more general humanitarian connotations. In these cases participants spoke of respect in terms of not harming others, of being honest, and of being generally “considerate” of others.

Perhaps the idea of respect was emphasized so strongly because it was a value many participants saw lacking in Canadian society (as we will discuss in more depth later in the report). Parents felt the need to counterbalance what they saw as the general disrespect Canadian children held toward adults, as stated by one father: “[We] believe that ‘good behaviour’ is to listen to your parent; listen to your teacher. However, western culture thinks ‘good behaviour’ means to be independent and self-motivated.”

Family

Teaching children about the importance of the family was another key value spoken of by all language groups. Children should love and respect their parents, siblings and extended family, and actively contribute to family life. They should know that the family has the greatest influence on their life, and that they will always be there to support them, whatever their age.

Consider the following quotations from various language groups.

I think that sisters and brothers must be the most important thing for the children for the rest of their lives. The family must be the most important part for them. – Central American mother

Family is the foundation of our life. The family we come from shapes us all. Respect the elders and take care of them. -Mandarin mother

We hope they always consider us their friends and talk to us when they need us. – Punjabi father

All of the parents have been raised in stable and strong family environments and that had a great influence when it came to raising their own children. – Serbo-Croatian facilitator

We teach our children instead of sending the parents away to a nursing home when they become old, the children become the caregivers of their parents. – Somali father

Religion and culture

Opinions about maintaining ones traditional religion and culture were less unified and more complex. There was a range of opinions across language groups as to the importance of teaching religious and cultural values.

Participants who emigrated from predominately Muslim countries (i.e., Iran, Afghanistan and Somalia) and from India (i.e., Punjabi speakers) tended to place a very high value on teaching both religious and cultural values. Children needed to learn these values to know what constituted good behaviour, and to keep themselves pure from sin and corruption (e.g., promiscuity, drugs and alcohol). One Iranian participant stated, “Religion has a very important role in our life. And God as well.”

In these groups, little distinction was made between religion and culture (including language). All seemed to be woven together and were considered to be equally important. For example, fathers in these groups emphasized their leadership role within the family as bestowed to them by society and by God.

The group asserted that their understanding of the ways and methods of parenting stems from their cultural and religious background, which essentially makes the

role of the father as head of the whole family, [the] most responsible person in the process of parenting of the children in the family. –Somali facilitator

The Central American participants also emphasized the importance teaching religious and cultural values. However, unlike the groups above, Central American participants did not place high importance on maintaining their home language. One Central American facilitator commented on how religion was the constant source of “refuge”, “strength” and “security” for participants coming from countries in political turmoil. For this reason they wanted their children to keep this familiar source of comfort.

[Children should learn to] believe in God, religious values (mostly Catholic), constant praying and learning from the Bible, [and] love to God and others. – Central American mother

Alternatively, teaching religion and their traditional language was not a priority for Serbo-Croatian and Mandarin speaking parents. In fact, a Mandarin facilitator went so far as to say that learning English was the most important priority for her participants and their children. Still, passing on traditional cultural and family values was seen to be critical. As mentioned earlier, both groups stressed teaching children to respect others and to understand the importance of the family.

Hopes and Future Goals

Most participants were very optimistic of their children’s future in Canada. Participants often said that they were hoping their children would have a better life than they themselves had. These high expectations were held despite the fact that many parents were struggling, even making personal sacrifices in order to provide for their families here in Canada. One Mandarin father said, “Our children are going to grow up here and they will learn the Canadian way. They will have a better chance than [us].”

Mothers from all language groups typically held similar hopes and goals for their daughters as they did for their sons. In a few language groups, however, fathers were more concerned about the future careers of boys and less so about their girls' future occupation.

Economic security

The most common hope that parents, particularly fathers, had for their children had to do with their long-term economic security. This resolve in ensuring a financially stable future for children was common across all language groups.

Education was usually seen as the key to an economically successful future. This was expressed strongly in the Mandarin groups, but in other groups as well. Some participants were taking proactive steps toward this end. For example, they were reading regularly to their children, helping with their homework or making financial plans for higher education. As a result, parents often held high educational goals for their children

I hope my children will attain an admission to universities and I wish (for them to) gain a high level of marks that will enable them to specialize in areas such as medicine or science. –Somali father

The ultimate goal of education was to find a secure job. Ideally the job would be one that the child would find personally satisfying.

My hope and future goals are that children should get the education they like and enjoy working or doing what ever they enjoy doing. That way they can achieve a lot in their life, [and]be happy and satisfied. –Punjabi mother

Often professional jobs were seen to be the pathway to success. After all, Canadian professional degrees were viewed as “valid around the world”, and giving “value to a person in front of the society.”

Good values

There were other hopes, in addition to economic ones, that parents had for their children. All language groups mentioned that they hoped their children would adopt good values. However, as we previously mentioned, what constituted “good values” differed among groups.

For the Somali, Iranian, Afghan, Punjabi and Central American groups this usually meant that parents wanted their children to keep traditional religious values. As a Punjabi participant commented, “Live a simple life, keep their culture and believe in God.”

In the remaining language groups (Serbo-Croatian and Mandarin) parents were more interested that their children keep traditional family values.

In order to have a healthy life, family values are important. I hope my daughter's future is built on a good foundation. If you have a good base, you will not be afraid of the storm. We can't promise that life will always be successful and without a hitch, but at least the strait will not look too bad when you pass through it. –Mandarin mother

Healthy and happy

Parents also hoped that their children would be healthy and happy when they grew up. This theme came out most strongly in the Serbo-Croatian, Central American and Mandarin groups. In the words of one of these facilitators, “Their main hope was that their children would grow up into healthy and honest individuals (in a way that they will follow their dreams and be happy in life).”

Often, health and happiness was related to having children create and reach their own goals and pursue their own personal interests. “I want for my kids to be happy, to be whatever they want to be, but for them to achieve their goals,” said a Central American participant. “I will respect their interests and support them to go for the goals that they make,” remarked a participant from the Mandarin group.

Contribute to society. A final point mentioned had to do with parents' hopes that their children would become good citizens and contribute to society. Most often parents had Canada in mind as the society that their children would help to shape and improve.

They expressed their wishes and aspirations to see their children grow to become healthy adults, morally and mentally, who will eventually make immense contributions to the development, progress and well-being of the Canadian society. –Somali facilitator

However, occasionally parents aspired for their children to eventually return to their home country and improve that society. This was the observation of an Afghani facilitator who commented that participants “hoped their children would get education, serve people and go to Afghanistan and rebuild their country.”

Summary of Parenting Orientations

Parenting orientations referred to the guiding beliefs and values that parents held, and the hopes and aspirations they had for their children. Participants based their orientations on their own upbringing as children.

Three main themes emerged about the guiding beliefs and values of parents. All groups spoke of the value of respecting others and of the importance of the family. The third theme dealt with the passing of culture (all groups) and traditional religion (some groups) on to their children.

Participants were generally optimistic about their children’s future in Canada. Aspirations for their children included economic security and a good education, the maintenance of good values, health and happiness, and that children would contribute back to society.

Parenting Style

Participants were also asked to talk about their parenting styles. Parenting styles are the roles they play in implementing their parenting orientations. In other words, parenting styles have to do with how parents shape their children, and the relationships that they build with them.

There was a great deal of discussion among focus group participants about parenting styles. Opinions were passionate and strong. Usually parenting styles were discussed in contrast to what participants saw as Canadian parenting styles (the next section in our discussion). It was obvious that participants took their roles as parents seriously.

Understanding Parenting Styles

To help summarize the data on parenting styles, we looked to North American parenting literature for a framework of understanding. Parenting styles are usually arranged into different categories along a particular continuum. One category on that continuum is often seen as the best or preferred parenting style.

A good example is Baumrind's (1966) classic model of authoritarian, authoritative or permissive parenting styles. Barabara Collorosso (1995) has popularized these dimensions into "brick wall", "backbone" and "jellyfish" categories respectively. This model is based on a continuum of how parents exercise control over their children. Authoritarian (or brick wall) styles describe parents who exert high control over children, while permissive (or jellyfish) styles use low control. The middle category (authoritative or backbone) is identified as most common in North America, and is seen as the parenting style producing the most socially adjusted children.

Newberger (1999), on the other hand, identifies four progressive levels of awareness parents may realize in their relationship with their children. These categories are: 1) "me as parent first", 2) "follow the rules", 3) "we are individuals", and 4) "living and growing together". Between the first and last level there is a growing awareness of the child's world, and what place a parent has in that world. While in level one the child is always seen through the parent's own needs, in level four the parent has progressed to seeing the uniqueness of each child and builds a mutual and reciprocal relationship with them. This dynamic relationship continually grows and changes over time.

When developing our own understanding of parenting styles, we considered these parenting models together with the data from our focus groups. We wanted our description of parenting styles to consider the issue of power and control between parents and children, including the extent to which a parent/child relationship is reciprocal and dynamic. But we also wanted to be open and let the data "speak" about the diversity of parenting styles from many different cultural backgrounds.

Foundational Aspects in Parenting Styles

When talking about parenting styles, participants often mentioned two perquisite roles that parents needed to adopt. These roles were foundational to any further role a parent was to take in shaping their child's future. One role was to be a "provider and protector" of their children, and the other was to provide "unconditional love".

Provider and protector

Some groups (particularly the Serbo-Croatian and Mandarin groups) emphasized the role of parents as provider and protector. Parents were required to look after the physical and safety needs of their children in a number of ways. For example, a parent should try to provide economic stability for the family and keep a child away from harmful influences. In the words of one Serbo-Croatian father, "The main task of a parent is to protect children and give them bread."

Supporting a child in their educational pursuits was an important element in providing for the future economic stability of a child. Parents spoke about helping their children with their homework, although this was sometimes difficult given a different educational system. Some parents also were taking steps to plan for their children's future (i.e., higher education) by contributing to Registered Educational Savings Plans (RESP) at a young age, or by guiding their course selection.

Unconditional love

It seems obvious to say that a parent should love her/his child. This idea of giving unconditional love was an underlying message across all groups. We heard many examples from participants:

I raised my children by myself. All I want to do is give them all my love and attention. I will try to understand them and change my position to theirs. –
Mandarin mother

They both should know we are always here for them, no matter what they do. –
Central American participant

I believe the best way I can teach my children is talking to them and letting them know I love them and I hope the best for them. –Central American mother

Thank them for helping. Praise them or even a little hug does not hurt. -Punjabi father

Most parents felt strongly that a child should feel love regardless of their actions. However, one participant used the withdrawal of love as a method of disciplining his child (“I tell him I don’t love him and won’t talk to him for a while”). The rest of the participants reacted strongly to this opinion, stressing that children should not feel unloved at any time.

Parental Power and Control in Shaping Children

As in all relationships, power dynamics are present in the parent-child relationship. As unique individuals, both parents and children have their own desires and wills. But as adults, parents play an important role in helping to shape their children. How parents use this natural power advantage in relation to their children is the focus of this section.

In our focus groups, parents spoke of four main types of parenting actions to help them to shape their children. These main types of actions are shown in the chart below and include “responding to bad”, “preventing bad”, “presenting good”, and “promoting well-being”. Parents from all cultures generally performed all types of actions.

Parents Shaping Children

| Parent's control over child's immediate behaviours | Main categories of parent actions | Description | Examples of actions |
|--|-----------------------------------|--|--|
| <p>Highest</p>  <p>Lowest</p> | Responding to Bad | Disciplining children when they do something bad. | Distract, "time out", take away privileges, lecture child, corporal punishment |
| | Preventing Bad | Keeping bad behaviour from happening. | Watch child, steer away from bad influences, set boundaries |
| | Presenting Good | Communicating values and behaviours children should adopt. | Role model, positive reinforcement, teach values, communicate expectations |
| | Promoting Well-being | Building mutual relationships to encourage well-adjusted adults. | Spend time, build friendship, affirm child's uniqueness |

The first three main categories of parenting actions (i.e., responding to bad, preventing bad, presenting good) can be seen as dealing with issues of morality. That is, parents saw their role as helping their children to understand the difference between what is good and what is bad. It was this role as moral guide that dominated the discussion on parenting styles.

The final main category of parenting action (i.e., promoting well-being) was different in nature. The promotion of well-being was seen less as having to do with shaping good behaviour but had more to do with shaping well-adjusted adults who are able to reach their potential. In comparison to the other categories, less information was gathered about this category.

The four types of parenting actions are organized in the chart above on a continuum of control that parents have over their child's immediate behaviours. At one end of the continuum parents exercise their power as an authority figure in responding to what is seen to be a child's bad behaviour. The purpose of this action is to immediately stop the behaviour that is seen to be inappropriate, and also to transmit values of what is appropriate in the future. The parent is in control of the situation, and his/her opinion is what matters. Here, the focus is on dealing with immediate negative behaviour.

As we move down the continuum, the parent gradually gives up their control in relation to their child's immediate behaviour. The focus increasingly becomes on the positive

At one end of the continuum a few parents (only mothers) responded to what they saw as bad behaviour by removing the child from the immediate situation. In using these “low intensity” methods parents and children interacted little about the bad behaviour. For example, a young child could be **distracted** from some inappropriate behaviour as a way to help avoid saying “no” to the child all the time. Alternatively, parents asked their children to go to their room and think about what they did wrong (i.e., have a “**time out**”).

The vast majority of parents, however, spoke of using more intensive and clearly communicated approaches when responding to their child’s behaviour. Often their comments were made in contrast to what they saw as more lax, tolerant and ineffective Canadian disciplining methods. The general sentiment across groups (particularly among fathers) was that parents needed to be more “strict, strong and sharp” to a child’s inappropriate behaviour and not give children too much freedom.

Some of the participants observed that the excessive atmosphere of tolerance and liberality allowed to [Canadian] children has misled a lot of children to dictate their own terms of behaviour. –Somali facilitator

Taking away privileges (sometimes called “negative reinforcement” or “grounding”) was seen as another way to communicate to children that their behaviour was inappropriate. Here, the child would learn that their behaviour needed to change and would be motivated by their desire to be able to do what they enjoyed. Taking away privileges was an approach that could be adapted to children of all ages (e.g., cannot play with toys while young, cannot go out with friends when older).

Take away what they like the most...that way they would like to have it back, so they have to behave to get their things back. –Central American father

I won’t do the things that I would usually do for them. For example, I don’t prepare their favourite meal or something like that to tell them that, if they don’t listen to me they won’t have my support or attention. -Iranian mother

Speaking to the child about their behaviour and its consequences was also a popular disciplining approach. This approach took the form of “scolding”, “discussing” or “explaining” to children how their behaviour was inappropriate, or by giving them advice about what should be done in the future.

I ask what they want to be and how are they achieving it and that by bad behaviour they will not get anywhere. I let them know that the goal is in front of them and not to the sides. –Central American participant

Speaking to children about their behaviour was often something done in combination with other disciplining methods. Parents would explain to their children why they were being disciplined in other ways.

There was an underlying sense of firmness in how parents approached these disciplining discussions. However, there was frequently another message as well. Parents tried to speak to their children with love, making sure to remain calm and respectful, “condemning the act, not the person”, and being fair and impartial between children.

Some of us will talk to them politely even if we are angry. I do not think shouting or screaming at them helps. Explain things with love and patience. -Punjabi participant

For some fathers, and a few mothers, the above disciplining approaches were not enough. They also saw value in using forms of **corporal punishment** identified as “spanking”, “physical punishment” or using “the stick”. This approach was generally used with younger children.

Whether or not to use physical forms of discipline was sometimes a contentious topic. While some participants from all language groups admitted to using physical punishment, it was controversial.

The voices for corporal punishment spoke of the need to use physical force as a way to effectively communicate and reinforce the lesson that needed to be learned. In their opinion physical punishment, used appropriately, could communicate a point that other disciplinary methods could not. Corporal punishment was typically seen as a method of last resort, used carefully when all other options had been exhausted.

What seemed to us to be a minority of participants disagreed with the use of physical punishment. Not only did these parents think that using physical force was ineffective, they even saw it as being counter-productive. To this end, one participant quoted the Afghan proverb: “the more you hit a child, the stronger he gets.”

2. Preventing bad

Guiding the moral development of a child was not limited to discipline. In addition to responding to what was seen as bad behaviour, parents talked about trying to prevent bad behaviour from happening in the first place. There were three main ways that parents went about preventing bad behaviour, each of which is described below. There were no notable language or mother/father differences.

A little spanking once in a while is worth a million words. –Central American participant

I love my son very much but I am a strict mother too. When he is not listening to me, I will spank his buttocks. –Mandarin mother

Spanking a child as long as you are not hurting a child is O.K. with me. –Punjabi participant

Some kids would rather be spanked than have to listen to their father’s speech for an hour. – Serbo-Croatian participant

Sometimes we should punish a child by using a small stick, but avoid exaggerating it. – Serbo-Croatian participant

Try talking to the child, but if they don’t listen then they need a spanking. -Afghani facilitator

In the past, I used corporal punishment but since we came to Canada, I changed my method and try to use other methods such as verbal punishment. But sometimes I feel desperate. –Iranian participant

First, a parent could **watch her/his child**. The assumption here was that children are aware of what good behaviour is, and knowing that their parents are watching them would be enough to keep them from straying from the right path.

We only have one child. If we do not watch them very close now, we can not imagine what kind of person they will be. Prevention is better than curing. –
Mandarin participant

Parents of children from all age groups used this approach. One father was embarrassed to admit that he even followed his 18-year-old son when he left the house. Keeping such a watchful eye on children was seen to be particularly necessary with parents who thought that their children were being introduced to new and different values in Canada.

Some mothers were saying some children should be kept an eye on all the time as they forget to listen and obey their parents when they come [to] this country. –
Punjabi facilitator

A more direct and active approach was to **steer children away from bad influences**. Potential negative influences could be other people such as friends, or it could be undesirable activities such as getting involved with drugs or skipping school. Specific strategies included monitoring whom they associated with, or diverting children towards positive activities.

Prevent them from association with those who may be [a] bad influence. We like to get to know a person and his/her family before our kids become friends with that person. –Iranian participant

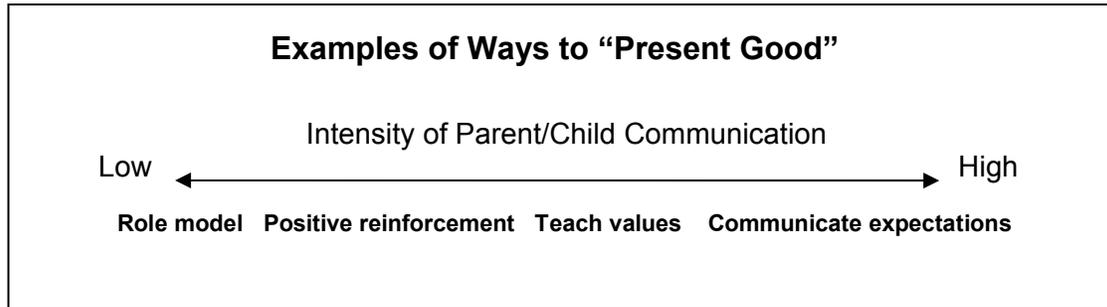
I will try to protect them from negative influences such as alcohol, delinquency, drugs, and include sport activities to develop team spirit and give them opportunities to spend extra energy. -Serbo-Croatian father

A final strategy in preventing bad behaviour had to do with clearly communicating what constitutes inappropriate behaviour and **setting boundaries** around what is inappropriate behaviour. Usually this meant forming house rules that controlled things like what children watched on television, or with what toys they played. A Serbo-Croatian parent commented, “My son is 18 but I have prohibited to him to wear ugly pants.”

3. Presenting good

Parents told us that being a moral guide is not only about responding to or preventing bad behaviour. A child should also be presented with what is morally good. Parents tried to communicate values and behaviours that they hoped their children would adopt.

Once again we heard examples on a continuum of low to high intensity. At one end of the continuum, parents presented the “good” by living it out as a role model. At the other end, the parent clearly articulated his or her expectations of good. There were no notable language or mother/father differences.



As **role models** parents tried to live actions that they wanted their children to live. Parents recognized the great influence they had on their children. “I cannot expect my child not to become an alcoholic,” said one participant, “if for ten years he sees me drunk every day.” Parents realized that their children would learn about what was good by observing the example of their parents.

We should be their role models. We should not do things...we do not want our children to do, for example shout or abuse any one in the family, or call people names. –Punjabi participant

Serbo-Croatian mothers and fathers used **positive reinforcements** as way to highlight good behaviour. They would reward the good behaviour of their children with hope that they would continue these behaviours in the future.

Parents would also communicate what is morally good by **teaching values** to children. One mother commented that she spent more time teaching her children about what is good than she did in punishing them for doing bad. By teaching values to their children, parents hoped to guide their children in making good moral judgements in the future.

They are teaching their kids about traditions and values that they brought from their county. They hope by doing that, the children would be more respectful to parents, family members, neighbours, friends, teachers etc. –Serbo-Croatian facilitator

Some parents emphasized teaching children about matters of faith and religion. For example, Somali mothers told us that they teach their child about Islam at a very young age. On weekends they would take their children to the mosque where they are taught the Quran. Punjabi fathers also highlighted the importance of the Gurudwara (Sikh temple) by teaching their children “that it is like a part of meditation, or time out for yourself to sit and gather your thoughts for a day.”

A few parents were very prescriptive in **communicating their expectations** of what was good to their children. These parents would clearly articulate to their children “what I want them to be like”, both in the present and in the future.

He is only six years old. He is still young. I try to talk to him but he does not understand me. So, I force him to listen to me. My parent taught me that way...this is the only way I know. My son thinks this is not fair. –Mandarin father

Other parents would encourage children to take up certain sports, or to pursue a certain career path. One parent made a detailed schedule of chores that his children needed to do around the house on a given day.

4. Promoting well-being (Building mutual relationships)

Through our discussions we heard another category of actions that parents used to shape their children. This category is what we call “promoting well-being”. Although limited and mentioned primarily by mothers, comments under this category were quite different in nature than the previous three categories. The well-being that is promoted has less to do with shaping good behaviour and more to do with shaping well-adjusted people who are able to reach their potential.

Actions in this category were the least direct in terms of controlling a child’s immediate behaviour. Parents did not try to directly present what they thought to be good behaviour to their child. Instead the actions of parents focused on building a long-term relationship with their child in which good behaviour resulted only indirectly. The focus was not on following parental rules or expectations. Instead it was on sowing the seeds of a deep, mutually respectful relationship with their child.

One way this was done was by simply to **spending time** with children. This point was made strongest by mothers particularly in the Serbo-Croatian and, to a lesser extent, the Punjabi groups. Parents saw it as their duty to take time to “listen to them”, “talk to them” and just “give them enough time”. In the Mandarin groups the emphasis was on spending time helping children with their schoolwork, particularly with math and English.

They felt that love can't be brought with expensive things. Instead it was more important to spend quality time and have patience with their children –Serbo-Croatian facilitator

Sometimes parents told us how important it was for them that *their* parents had spent time with them as children. They felt that the time invested had helped them to grow into well-adjusted adults. They worried, however, about whether they would be able to do the same for their children here in Canada. Economic pressures meant that both parents were often working, in school or looking for work.

When the parents were children themselves, they were greatly loved and lot of quality time was spent with them, which helped them grow into strong and healthy adults. All of them seemed to be concerned [about] whether they would be able to offer their children the same [nurturing environment] as their parents did for them. -Serbo-Croatian facilitator

Before, children had more ambitions and parents kept encouraging them, but now [both] parents and children do not have time for each other. -Punjabi participant

For a few parents (mostly mothers), this time spent together was the foundation for a **friendship** with their child. “Give them enough time”, said a participant, and “be their friend.” For these parents, an effort was made to occasionally put aside the natural power differences between parent and child, and to relate to them as equal human beings.

These friendships were described as mutual relationships which were “open and honest”, had “good continual communication”, and where parents exercised “trust” in their children’s decisions. Being able to admit mistakes to a child was another element in building parent/child friendships.

My son knows that I love him very much. I will say sorry to him when I make a mistake. We are like good friends. –Mandarin participant

Another way parents guided their children was to **affirm their child’s uniqueness**. In the words of one participant, “children are special because of the way that they are.” Parents needed to help their children develop their own interests and talents. Interests were nurtured by giving young children opportunities to develop in areas they seemed to enjoy, and by allowing them to learn and grow at their own pace. As one participant stated: “I would like to open a free space for my son to develop his own interests.”

Lessons of a Mandarin Mother

“I think I am a good mother. When my daughter was young, I supported her in the best ways to learn dancing, piano and drawing. I followed the way of most parents in China. Now, when I recall her childhood, I feel I was not quite right at the time. I took her childhood away. I didn’t realize this until now (she is 13 now). She started to play piano when she was 4 years old. At that time she was tiny, her fingers could not able to reach the piano when she sat on the regular chair. She practiced piano everyday and it was a hard learning process. At the same time, she was learning dancing and drawing.

“One day she told me a story. She said, ‘Long time ago, a young duckling listened to her mom and went to learn how to fly from a goose. She could fly but not as high as the goose. She then went to learn how to jump from a kangaroo but she could not jump as fast as the kangaroo did. The mother duck was so disappointed, she told the duckling that she couldn’t do anything anymore. She decided to keep the duckling beside her and taught her duckling how to swim. The mother duck was surprised to find that her duckling became a very good swimmer. Mom, I don’t like to play piano. Why have you asked me to learn it?’

“I was so astonished. I couldn’t believe the words come from her mouth. I felt I have no right to force her learn the thing she dislikes. She stopped learning piano until she entered elementary school. At the time, she showed an interest in music and she never turned it down. Most parents in China follow the example of other parents. The pressure is from friends or society. They usually do not consider a child’s interest or ability. They do not really care about what children want, they are only concerned about what other families do.”

The Mandarin groups in particular emphasized the importance of supporting children in following their own personal interests. They also stressed not pressuring or comparing children with others. “We should learn to enjoy the child’s progress instead of looking for

desired results”, said one participant. It seemed that these participants were reacting to the lack of freedom they experienced as children (see box).

Language, Mother/Father, Gender and Age Differences

Language differences

There were few differences among language groups when parents talked about their disciplining approaches. And discipline was what parents mostly talked about under this section.

The only noteworthy language group difference under parenting styles was between the Serbo-Croatian and Mandarin groups relative to other groups around the more foundational and relational aspects of parenting styles. The Serbo-Croatian and Mandarin groups emphasized their role as provider and protector of children, while other groups did not. The Serbo-Croatian parents were the most vocal in speaking about the importance of spending time with their children, while the Mandarin groups spoke most about affirming the unique interests of their child.

Other language groups focused most of their discussion on more direct ways of being a moral guide to their children. This observation is not all that surprising given that the Serbo-Croatian and Mandarin groups were least likely to emphasize transmitting religious values to their children (as seen under the parenting orientation section). It appears that other language groups (e.g., Somali or Iranian) were more vigilant in guiding their children in knowing the difference between right and wrong as determined by their religion.

Mother/father differences

While there were relatively few differences among language groups, there were more differences between mothers and fathers. One major difference had to do with their approach to discipline. Fathers tended to be stricter in their opinions on discipline, choosing to use stronger communicative methods (such as lecturing and corporal punishment). Mothers, on the other hand, used a wider range of methods than fathers, but were more likely to avoid using corporal punishment.

My husband usually is the bad guy. I am the good guy... One time when my husband punished [our son], he did not talk to my husband for a week. I told my husband that he didn't spend enough time with our child like I do. That is why the child is against him. –Mandarin mother

Mothers also spoke more in depth about the different aspects of the relationships they had with their children. For example, in addition to being a disciplinarian, mothers emphasized their nurturing role as a parent. They spoke of the importance of spending time and building long-lasting friendships with their children. Mothers were also more likely to see themselves as running the day-to-day operations of the home. As such, a mother had the opportunity to influence her children in ways that fathers traditionally could not. Consider the following quotation from a Punjabi mother speaking about the importance of education.

As a woman it is very important that women should be educated, as education starts at home. I have been hearing this phrase since I was a child. Just imagine a mother who is not educated but still manages to bring up her family so well. She feeds them three times a day, bathes and dresses them, looks after, and nurtures them. Well she is the home minister in her own home. Since education starts at home, can you imagine how our society would be like if all mothers are educated!!! –Punjabi mother

Gender differences

We asked participants if there were any differences in the ways in which they raised their sons versus their daughters. Opinions about **gender differences** appeared to be split. On one hand, many parents (particularly mothers) said that they guided and disciplined girls and boys in the same way.

In my opinion both girls and boys should be brought up equally because it is healthy. [This way], both the genders will learn to treat and respect each other. – Punjabi mother

On the other hand, some participants (particularly fathers) mentioned differences in how they raised sons and daughters. In these cases, parents gave more freedom to sons to do activities outside of the home, while daughters were to learn about keeping a good home.

Everybody felt that parenting styles for their daughters and sons are the same. However some felt that their husbands have different views. The husbands feel that boys shouldn't be doing housework...they should be taught to prepare for outside work and girls should learn housework. –Iranian facilitator

Participants recognized that raising girls and boys in this way was not consistent with the Canadian norm. As a Punjabi facilitator commented: "Participants talked at length about treating sons and daughters differently (i.e., giving sons more freedom, raising girls to be housewives). This is at odds with the way things are here in Canada."

Age differences

With regard to how parents guide children of different age cohorts, the comments were consistent across groups. To begin with, parents generally acknowledged that the foundational aspects of parenting (i.e., communicating love, providing and protecting children) should remain constant across the life span.

No matter what age they are they should know that God and I love them and that is why they have to behave and that God wants productive people. –Central American participant

And yet we heard parents clearly highlight the child's early years as a crucial time to lay the foundations for future life. The relationship between parent and child needs to be

strongly established while the child is young. Similarly, moral values must be communicated while young.

Mothers felt that if the relationship with their children was not established in [the] younger years, it is almost impossible to achieve it when they are a little older. Therefore a great emphasis was placed on spending lots of quality time with children. For example, one mother said that once the child is older it is very hard to be as influential as when they are very young. –Serbo-Croatian facilitator

When speaking of how to discipline children from different age groups, parents pointed out both similarities and differences. Generally, talking to their child about their behaviour and its consequences was used across all age cohorts. Taking away privileges from children was another method used across ages, although what was taken away changed as a child became older. If corporal punishment was used, it was typically used for younger children.

Summary of Parenting Styles

For most participants, shaping their children was a moral responsibility to teach children the difference between right and wrong. Most discussions focused on how to discipline children with few language differences noted. Mothers tended to use a broader variety of discipline methods, while fathers focused on more intensive methods such as lecturing their child or corporal punishment.

Despite a common theme of unconditional love mentioned across all language groups, there was an undercurrent of firmness in participant's comments. Parents generally expressed a need to use their power as an adult to influence and control their child's behaviours and to teach them values. With some exceptions (i.e., with Mandarin and Serbo-Croatian parents, and some mothers across all other groups), there was little emphasis on promoting the long-term well being of children, through the building of mutual, nurturing and long-term relationships between parent and child.

Canadian Context – Perceptions of Canadian Parenting

Culture shapes us and is central to everything we do and think. Culture refers to a shared identity based on a common language, shared values and attitudes. It is reflected in art, music, the food we eat, the clothes we wear, and the way we talk to each other. Culture provides emotional stability, underlies our self-esteem and influences our behaviour. Family rituals, religion, language, and history influence our children and contribute to their sense of identity, security and sense of esteem (Avard & Harmsen, 2000).

Canadian culture is hard to be understood and judged by immigrant families. Most newcomers are in the process of discovering cultural values and behaviours, however this education occurs mostly through learning the necessary language skills and observing others. Immigrant parents have very little contact with Canadian parents, therefore it is hard for them to compare and draw a distinction between the Canadian way of raising a family to their own.

Comments about Canadian context were based more on emotional reactions to what immigrant parents see and hear about Canada than their systematic knowledge. Most participants do not know about parenting in Canada. Some of them did not feel comfortable speaking publicly about their thoughts and opinions, and some were unsure about how to express themselves.

Immigrant parents want their children to fit well in the new community but at the same time they do not want their kids to act differently at home. They realize that their parenting approach should be similar to the Canadian way because children are exposed to Canadian values through schools (e.g., peers) and the media (e.g., TV, books, movies, videos, jokes, etc.). This Canadian way of raising children is supported by institutions and the community. However, most immigrant parents also want their children to capture the best from their cultural heritage, so that they still fit into their society back home.

With this understanding, immigrant families implement parenting strategies according to their growing exposure to Canadian context. They combine strategies learned in their countries of origin and those being learned in Canada. The blending nature of immigrant parenting will be described in the modification section. Now, we will describe how immigrant parents view Canadian parenting.

Immigrant parents talked about Canada emphasizing similarities and differences between socio-political, educational, cultural, and lifestyle factors.

Socio-Political Factors

In eyes of recent immigrants, Canada is a democratic country with a materialistic focus. One father said that, “Canadian political system is a Democratic Socialism, I mean a socialism with food.” Democratic values underlie policy and practice in Canada, including parenting. Values such as freedom, independence, determination, individualism, and respect of privacy formulate the basis of understanding and the creation of actions. Equalization, especially between women and men, and equal treatment of children, regardless of gender, was strongly highlighted. One mother expressed her opinion saying, “I’ve seen that at the church and everywhere, they give the same freedom to men and women and girls and boys.”

Immigrant parents expressed a fear of modern society as going away from true values in life. They emphasized the danger and struggle in focusing on individualism and competitiveness. For example, one father said, “The Western way is more flexible and free. Chinese culture is more conservative.” Another mother added, “Here, the most important thing for families are materialistic things, such as a good car, nice house, etc.”

Educational Factors

Education is an important value of immigrant parents and was the main issue for all language groups when they talked about the Canadian context. While most parents articulated their unhappiness with Canadian educational system, some saw many positive elements. Fathers were more critical towards Canadian education than mothers. One father expressed an opinion shared by many others saying that, “Canada’s educational system [is not too good and] is producing people that do not think. Primary education is not strong as in other countries.”

Immigrant parents want their children to succeed in their lives, and this is based on a good and solid education. However, the educational system in Canada is different than the way many immigrant parents think about education. They would like the system to be stricter, emphasizing academic knowledge and making sure children learn concrete information. One mother described the difference in education systems between her home country and here (see box).

Many of immigrant parents found teaching sex education inappropriate. Mothers talked about the issue of sex education more than fathers. One Punjabi mother said, “Sex education starts too early and I think it shouldn’t even be at schools because it promotes bad behaviours.” An Iranian mother added, “Openness around talking about sex is a major concern. In Iranian culture sex before marriage is forbidden and unacceptable.”

“After I came to Canada, I heard a new word called EQ. This is testing your emotion quotient. I only know of IQ that is testing your intelligence quotient. This idea came from North America. People from China all have been forced into a strict education system. You hardly see their IQ under the standard. The fact is we all run away from China. Why? This is our EQ asking us to do this for our children.

People are friendly in Canada. When I move to Waterloo, I didn’t know anyone. I lived in an apartment. My neighbour was always very nice say “Hello” to me. When I have the chance to talk to them, I was surprised to learn that she doesn’t have a job and she still smiles, and is willing to help me.

My father was an engineer and my mom was a doctor. Both of them were busy. In my childhood I grew up with my grandparents. I used to be working. It seems to be a pattern--parents working and grandparents watch the children. I was surprised to learn the Canadian mother would rather stay home to raise their children than to go out work. They will have many children and stay home until their kids grow up. They will quit a job and watch the children. They feel children need her when they were young. Children will grow up very fast if you don’t stay with them. You are going to lose the chance to see them grow. It is so hard to me to understand. Canadian mothers believe that if you give the children time and love, then the children will grow up to be a healthy adult.” -Mandarin mother

Religious and Cultural Factors

Religious and cultural factors are an important framework for understanding parenting in Canada. There are many differences in culture that immigrant parents noted shortly after arriving in Canada. For example, people touching and kissing in public was shocking to participants, the idea of “dating” conflicted with religious beliefs, differences in behaviors and appearances (wearing clothes, make up, hair styles, etc.), and differences in marital status (single parent families, same sex parents) were noted. On the other hand, they identified positive differences such as many open and friendly people, caring for small children, and respecting children’s personal privacy.

Some ethnic groups saw more differences between their own and Canadian ways of parenting than other groups. For example one father said:

I don't think there is much similarity between our parenting and Canadian [ways] because we are from different cultures, and different religions, and our family life is different than Canadians. - Iranian father

Another person presented an opposite view by saying, "Both Canadians and us love children and save money for their future education purposes."

Love of children

Love was the value that all immigrant parents emphasized as the foundation for parenting. As one mother enthusiastically expressed, "Love that exists for children is similar among nations." Most of the parents talked about love as an unconditional value, but some of them stressed the importance of rules and guides when parenting. They saw Canadians as parents who love children and care for children. The main difference was in the way they treat younger versus older children.

Canadian people are overprotective with small children, they are around them all the time, and they let them do anything. But when their children become teenagers, the parents don't pay enough attention to their children. Because they do not guide them further, they do not get any respect and appreciation from them. -Central American mother

Diversity of families

In the view of newcomers, Canadian parents are open and friendly. Most of them are polite and respectful but at the same time they maintain their own privacy. Immigrant parents noted that Canadian families are diverse (e.g., there are a large number of single-parent families). One father expressed:

I hardly can find one entire family in my neighborhood or other places with an entire family consisting of father, mother and children. I heard that 30 years ago, Canadian families were different, but now you mostly see single parents. There are children who never see their father, or see each other very seldom.- Iranian father

Respect for elders

Immigrant parents thought that there is little respect shown by Canadian children towards their elders. For example one father said, "Children in Canada are tolerated for arguing even vigorously with grown-ups especially with their parents. This is not permitted in my home." Another person mentioned that here, elementary teachers are treated more like friends than authority figures.

Canadians do not teach children to respect other people (e.g., old people, teachers, parent, etc.). Here, values have been scarified for freedom, but unlimited freedom.

I can say openly that [in] the Canadian context, parenting styles and schools are obstacles for me to raise my children. -Iranian father

Immigrant parents emphasized their strong family values, such as respect and taking care of elders (parents and grandparents). They also highlighted the therapeutic role of an immigrant family.

If you are stressed out, Canadians go to talk to the strangers. We talk to our family members, a grandfather, mother or father, etc. -Serbo-Croatian mother

Disciplining bad behaviour

Immigrant parents stressed that in their opinion, both Canadians and immigrants love and care for their children but they may have different ways to discipline children's bad behaviours. The participants seemed to believe that the Canadian way of disciplining was too liberal and ineffective. "In Canada, parents are too permissive toward their children," said one mother. Another participant said:

I think that Canadian parents give too much freedom to their children... They let them do whatever they want to, and I do not think that it could harm their children [to have and know] limits. – Central American mother

Participants agreed that all parents are faced with similar challenges when it comes to different age groups. There are many similarities in parenting kids between 0-5 years old and fewer similarities in parenting older children, especially teenagers. In general they all agreed that parenting becomes more difficult with children in their teenage years.

Canadians emphasize love. In my house RULE is before LOVE. Where children are young, we need to have patience and a loving heart to teach them, but when they are grown and go to schools, they need to learn to follow the rules. Schools have school rules, countries have laws, and in my house there are rules to not allow mistakes to happen again. -Mandarin mother

Respect for children

In the newcomer's view, Canadian parents respect children's privacy and their independence, choice and control of their own life much more than immigrant parents. One participant said, "Sometimes Canadians even do not check who their children's friends are." In the newcomer's opinion, Canadian children have much more freedom than their children. Very often the kids will say to their own parents "you are not my boss." One mother indicated, "I have watched people at the church, and I've noticed that they do not discipline their children."

Canadian Lifestyle Factors

Canadian lifestyles are often different than the lifestyles of newcomers. Some participants expressed an opinion that Canadian parents do not give 100 per cent of themselves to their children, rather they try to live their life to the fullest even after having kids. Immigrant parents are more committed to raising their children.

On the other hand, immigrant parents noticed that Canadians are willing to stay at home with their children when they are young. As one mother said, “I admired a Canadian mother staying at home to take care of her children without any doubt. In my country the grandparents take care of the children when parents go to work.”

Work and lack of quality time

In the newcomers’ view, the Canadian lifestyle affects family life in a negative way. Families do not spend quality time together, as parents are too busy with their lives. Children are separated from families very early, as parents have to leave children in daycare and go to work. Work is very demanding and stressful, so family members come together late in the day, exhausted and ready for bed. One father described it in the following way:

Lifestyle here in general leads to alienating children from their parents. If mom and dad work, buy a house and a car, they have to work and pay for that. Their kids go to school and parents do not have enough time to deal with children. Somehow children are pushed in a second plan, and in the first one are material values. When parents come home late afternoon tired and nervous, under stress, they don’t have patience to care properly about children. -Serbo-Croatian father

Children and work

Most immigrant parents were surprised that Canadian children start to work very early in their lives. In their countries parents support kids until they complete their education or sometimes even longer. It seemed to be controversial for focus group participants to decide which way is better. On one hand, it is a good idea for children to have more responsibilities and keep them from trouble, while on the other hand, parents are afraid that kids taste too much freedom by working, and therefore may drop out of school and ruin their future.

Influence of TV

The study participants talked about the role of television in parenting. In their opinion, many Canadian families use TV as the main source of family knowledge. Children are exposed to TV too much and what children see on TV makes parenting difficult for newcomers. One father said, “I had to explain that a sheriff who is catching thieves is too aggressive and thus he is not a positive character. My children are taking the sheriff’s behaviour as being positive.”

Summary of Canadian Context

Immigrant parents admitted that the process of discovering and learning about the Canadian ways of parenting has been an ongoing one. They noticed some similarities and numerous differences between their own views on parenting and those of other Canadians. Major similarities included emphasizing the well being of children. Parents also want their children to become respectful, responsible and productive.

Major differences included being stricter in discipline and having closer families. “Normal” relationships (i.e., father earns for a wife, mother takes care of children) are challenged in Canada as well as the idea of “dating,” which is opposed to the way many parents were raised.

Participants also thought that they put a greater emphasis on education and school. They often found a second job or borrowed money to help children concentrate on education. In the view of many immigrant parents, sex education is inappropriate as well as some behaviour of boys, girls and adults in public.

Modifications - Parenting in Transition

Most parents admitted that their methods, styles and attitudes towards parenting have undergone some major changes, to varying degrees, depending on their personal circumstances, individual experience, the age of their children and the duration of their stay in Canada. They admitted that they were consciously making changes without necessarily being in harmony with everything they knew and believed about the process of parenting. Some parents found it hard to reconcile their cultural ways of parenting with those of Canadians. Parents want their children to fit in, but they do not want them to act in the “Canadian” way. They also found it hard to raise kids traditionally, (according to their old culture), because all of the "Canadian" ways of parenting are supported by institutions and the community.

The process of modification involves an ongoing negotiation between what people have known as good and what they see others know as good. Because immigrant parents often do not have much exposure to the “Canadian” way of parenting, the process of learning and modifying can be painful and slow. For some parents the way Canadians raise children is a paradigm shift from the way they themselves were raised in their countries.

To describe the process of parenting change and modification to the Canadian way, we emphasize changes in the amount of control parents use in their relationships with their children. This includes using a variety of strategies to respond to challenging behaviours (more lower intensity parent-child interactions). It also includes promoting the well-being of families by making parent/child relationships more equal and respectful (focus on prevention and health promotion).

We divide this section on parenting modifications according to changes in parenting awareness and practice, changes in relationships between children and parents, and role reversal and changes in families.

Changes in Awareness Underlying Parenting

Tolerance and freedom

The participants reported that they have given more freedom to their children since living in Canada. They also admitted that their children enjoy this freedom, and that it can often lead to problems. Giving children more freedom relates to the developmental stages of children lives and still depends on differences between gender (i.e., girls have less freedom than boys).

Immigrant parents also reported showing more tolerance towards their children since coming to Canada. This tolerance was developed because of three main factors: 1) the parents' understanding and awareness of adaptation challenges children face, 2) the influences of Canadian culture, and 3) the role reversals in immigrant families (i.e. a child translating a phone call to his/her parents).

Making friends and equalizing relationships with children were the strategies implemented by many parents. Parents faced challenges similar to those faced by their children, so they often supported each other as peers ("kids are under stress as we are"). Parents also relied on children more in their new country, using their help in responding to life circumstances.

Immigrant parents reported having more dialogue with their children than before. They talked and explained things to children, and they listened to their children more often. Because there were many things in the Canadian context which were new both to children and parents, the process of parenting was challenged by the need to understand and to protect.

Independence

The value of independence is one of the main values representing modern society. Children learn to be independent much earlier in Canada than in other countries. Small children are left with babysitters or day-care providers, and older children spend more time outside home and are expected to be responsible for themselves.

Participants were challenged by this concept of child independence, but were slowly beginning to see the positive side of it. They were learning to allow children to be more independent and to let go of parental control. Mothers responded better to this issue than fathers.

Most immigrant parents were afraid of their children leaving home. In many countries children, no matter what their age (even if they are in their thirties), do not move out of their parents' home unless they were married or away from home. Focus group participants reflected on several bad examples of immigrant children leaving their homes. Some immigrant parents expressed their disappointment by the message kids were getting at schools about freedom and protection from abusive parental methods. They found it sometimes oppressive and threatening to their parental rights. One father gave an example saying:

One child came home from school saying that his parents couldn't touch him because if they did, he will call 911 and they'd be in trouble. The teacher who told him this didn't explain its use properly and the son came home victorious like he'd won some battle against his parents. This makes parenting more complicated. -Serbo-Croatian facilitator

Different time management

Immigrant parents spend more time with children now in Canada than before in their home country. This is because they are at home more (employment challenges), they do not have many contacts outside home (isolation in their new environment), and they realize the importance of the relationship with their children. Often fathers stay with children more than mothers. As one mother said, "Here, fathers are helping children with schools and babysitting when mothers go to work. The dads are really involved where it used to be only moms."

Different time management has positive and negative effects. Spending more time with children helps to know them better. This knowledge and time spent with children helps to facilitate new ways of disciplining children. On the other hand, when parents are at home, they are often depressed and trying to cope with settlement issues. This may cause stress and overprotection. One mother described the issue using the following words: "I spent more time with my children so they wouldn't be attracted to people outside home."

Modification in disciplining

Major changes in parenting reported by immigrant parents have been in how they discipline their children. Parents who used to be strict and reactive towards children's behaviours try to be more understanding and proactive in their parenting strategies. They often talk with children rather than giving them orders. Changes in parents' strategies have appeared mostly because of changes in children's behaviour and outside influences (e.g. legal system, observations of others).

In the past, I used corporal punishment but since we came to Canada, I changed my method and try to use other methods such as verbal punishment. But sometimes I feel desperate. -Iranian father

In Iran some people used to hit their kids but here it is not acceptable. In Canada it is encouraged to talk to your kids and respect them and it is better. -Iranian mother

Mothers were more likely to modify their disciplining strategies earlier than fathers. Some fathers believed that they should not change the way they discipline children, especially when dealing with older children. In two focus group discussions fathers reported that when children grow older, parents should become stricter in disciplining. "If we let one thing go, our kids will step aside from good behaviour." "Upbringing by words only, is very difficult--some children would like much more to be punished than to listen [to a] parent's one hour talk."

The participants noticed that disciplining requirements differ between children. One father reflected that he did not have the same challenges with his daughter (17 year old) as he did with his son.

After we came to Canada my son started to imitate mainstream youths. If I let him go with one thing he will continue with cigars, drugs or who knows what. I have

to follow him to see with whom he is in contact, places where he goes. I am afraid he will get into bad groups, try drugs or something else. Simply, as children grow up you have to control them more and more. -Serbo-Croatian father

Dealing with changes in child's behaviour and power reversal. Immigrant parents experienced challenges in parenting their children. Like other parents, those challenges were related in part to developmental changes (i.e., children growing and changing). However, these challenges were also related to the immigration context, both in terms of changes in children's behaviours and in power reversals between parents and children.

Immigrant parents noted many changes in their children's behaviours since arriving in Canada. The main changes included altered habits (e.g., no greetings, listening to loud music, etc.), changes in appearance (e.g., different clothes, make-up and hair style), and changes in needs like toys, computers, and sport equipment. These changes were understood by most of the parents, however the responses to changes in children's behaviours vary. For example one mother said:

My children have changed according to their new cultural identity. They do not want to be identified as Latin American kids, they don't want to listen to my music and be caught speaking Spanish. They are afraid of group rejection because of their original culture. -Central American mother

The data show that for immigrant fathers it is sometimes harder to accept children's new behaviours than for immigrant mothers. Most of the fathers expressed that by accepting children's new needs, appearances and habits, bad behaviours were welcomed and allowed in their homes. One father expressed this in the following way:

Children's clothing sometimes is not acceptable. Once my son went to buy wide jeans pants, because he saw it on other students. I have prohibited him to wear it. I said to him that he wouldn't wear it until he lives in my house. If I let one thing go, our kids won't stop, and they will step aside from good behaviour. -Serbo-Croatian father

There was a resistance of power reversal observed among immigrant parents. Unexpected changes in children's behaviours and role reversals (children playing adults roles in family lives such as being translators, negotiators, teachers, etc.) brought challenges to parenting. One father described a situation, in which his son (13 years old) promised to help him in contacting the English-speaking superintendent in their building:

However, when time came, my son said that he would not go with me. I couldn't understand him, what to do with him, to beg him or to bite him. I was very angry and started to threaten him. After several minutes he was afraid and agreed to go with me. -Serbo-Croatian father

Changes in Relationships Between Parents and Children

The relationship between me and my children has totally changed because our lifestyles changed, our economic situation changed and finally our environment has changed. -Iranian mother

The relationship between immigrant parents and children is the most important and dynamic platform for understanding parenting in a foreign country. The development and maintenance of positive relationships is closely related to power and control issues. The relationship needs to be nurtured and occasionally tested.

Immigrant parents reported that both children and parents are under constant stress related to a new environment, new language, dealing with schools and other institutions, surviving difficulties and being away from each other for long period of time each day when employed. These factors posed challenges to how parents and children strengthen their relationship.

The closeness between children and parents does not stay the same. If parents are working all the time, everyone does their own things, you have to struggle to have more time with children, everyone comes home [at] different times, eats meals by themselves. Sometimes the friendship they have built at home does not stay the same. -Punjabi mother

Developmental differences

Participants expressed their understanding about how children struggle in adapting to their new environment. Immigrant children have been exposed to western values and Canadian culture much quicker and much more strongly than their parents. Children of different ages differed in how they adapted to their new home, and parents needed to respond differently to these developmental stages.

In the view of newcomer parents, children who were under five years of age adapted easily to their new environment. In these cases, parent modifications included disciplining and understanding behavioural expectations (i.e. in daycare settings). Parents were more likely to give up teaching children their mother language and their background culture.

Children between the ages of 6-13 needed more freedom and wanted to spend time outside of the home. Disciplining became more difficult as children were better able to communicate in English than in the language used at home. Parents felt disconnected as children developed relationships outside the home, and as the child's behaviour was different than expected. Parental modifications included changes in disciplining and relationships with children. As one mother said:

Children dress up as the western way, walk and talk the way they see from the TV. They talk back to their mothers and never listen. Especially, when they are in

their teen years, they think they do not need a parent and they can survive on their own. -Somali mother

Parents that have children in the 14-18 age group faced the most problems (“More worries with elder children”). Here, parent’s values were not consistent with their children’s, and parents felt that children sought help outside of the home. They did not have enough knowledge and skills to solve problems within the new context. Often parents could not express themselves and were unable to tell their children the differences between right and wrong. Parental modifications included disciplining, allowing freedom and independence, and building new relationships with children. As one father stated:

I have more problems with older children than younger children. The older they become, the more problems we are going to face. For example, before they used to be more obedient but now they are more obstinate. Now when I ask them to do something or not to do [it], they want to find out the reason and [are] questioning all the time why they have to do things. Now I have to explain every single thing for them. -Iranian father

Another mother asserted, “It changes a little bit according to the age, because the older ones want to be outside or go to different places, because everyone else does it.”

Confusion in parenting roles

Sometimes parents were not sure what role to play in raising kids. Should they act as protectors of their cultural values or should they act as acceptors of new kinds of behaviours? Should they act in the traditional way of a parent, or should they equalize the relationship and act as friends? One mother said, “I act as my children’s friend rather than mother.”

Most immigrant parents reported that their relationships with children changed since coming to Canada, sometimes for worse, sometimes for better.

Worse Relationship

Some immigrant parents reported that their relationship with children was not too close and worsened since coming to Canada. One Mandarin father said, “Maybe because I am too strict to him, he has not come to me. We are not as close as before. Now he will just go back his room.” Another mother echoed this:

They are more quiet than before. Before we used to talk all the time, and here I found hard to get a good conversation or at least talk to them, especially the small ones. -Central American mother

Reasons for worsening relationships were stress, work hours and lack of quality time with children. One father emphasized this in the following way:

Parents are busy with work or school and they can’t spend more time with children. [My] relationship with [the] children is getting weaker. School can be a

good place to teach students respect parents and different culture. -Mandarin father

Better Relationship

Some parents reported that their relationship with children was closer and happier. They talked and listened to each other, solved problems together and helped each other.

We have a closer relationship with our son. I stay home to take care of him...encourage him not feel discouraged by failure. We are closer than before. - Iranian mother

Parents listed many reasons for better relationships with their children, one of which was having more opportunities in Canada. One mother said, "There is more opportunity for the kids. Because of that they are happier and that has a positive effect on their relationship with their family."

Same Relationship

There were a small number of parents that reported that their relationships with children have stayed the same. Those parents had a positive relationship with their children prior to coming to Canada, reporting that they openly talked about everything with children, and children trusted them to share their thoughts and problems. Those parents also expressed that children needed more freedom and acceptance as they grew older. A mother asserted that by saying:

They have become a little bit more active here but my relationship with all of them is the same. We all sit together and keep having the same close relationship as always no matter if it is my daughter or my two sons. -Central American mother

Two mothers added:

For me it has not changed at all. The difference is that I have been giving them more freedom because I cannot take them everywhere, but they have remained the same with me. -Central American mother

I have not faced that problem. They tell me everything just the same as before. - Central American mother

Some parents did not allow the relationships with their children to change. They did this by keeping things at home the same as they were prior to immigration and by not modifying their parenting strategies. One mother expressed this clearly:

Our relationship is the same. My children have tried to have more freedom, but we have not allowed that. They also asked to have a job or have money in their pockets, but we don't think that's good. So even if they tried to change we have guided them to keep things the same. -Central American mother

Role Reversal and Changes in Families

The role of mothers

The mothers' role is very important in any family, but especially in the newcomer family. Mothers needed to keep balance of everything that happened in the home. They seemed to be more receptive and inclined to accept their children's assertiveness. They often found jobs more easily than men and their adaptation to change was generally quicker than fathers. Mothers experienced a lot of pressure and stress coming from both children and fathers. Mothers were facilitators, change agents and negotiators between children, who wanted to change, and fathers who are more reluctant to change. In the view of one father:

Mothers form a kind of new alliance against the parenting style of the fathers.
Many children regard that can get away with a lot of wrongdoing. –Somali father

The role of fathers

New immigrant fathers face a whole series of challenges as they attempt to adopt. Fathers confront unemployment and underemployment, racism, language barriers, role reversals and sometimes, declining self-esteem. The whole family feels the impact (Este, Shimoni & Clark 1999). Employment is not only necessity for survival in a new country but also relates to self-esteem and a sense of settling in a new country.

Fathers in the Mandarin group did not speak of employment issues or experiencing role changes since coming to Canada. For these fathers, their roles as "father" has remained intact. Some fathers in our study, however, expressed frustration with their employment situation, with role reversals in families and with lack of respect from children and wives. For example, many fathers felt victimized in Canada. They asserted that the children and their mothers were favoured and taken seriously by the Canadian society and government. They believed that the role of fathers was trivialized. Fathers believed that when coming to Canada they lost much of their rights and privileges as fathers. These rights and privileges were instead given to children, mothers and the state. One Somali father stated, "I would be happy if I say him something and he obeys me."

The process of immigration can lead to role reversals among family members and may give rise to different family dynamics. For example, immigrant children often learn English and more about Canadian culture prior to their parents. Power and control is therefore challenged in family relationships.

The study participants talked about their resistance to the power changes and about their feelings of being threatened by children. Yet most participants agreed that they did have to change a lot as parents. They needed to balance role reversals by equalizing relationships with their children and by letting go of control. Living in a different part of the world meant adjustment, flexibility, and being critical and open minded. All of those attributes were difficult to develop especially when immigrant parents did not have the necessary supports.

Some participants already learned the need for this ongoing change in other countries, prior to immigrating to Canada. One father said, “My role had changed first in another foreign country where the punishing has been also prohibited.” It was especially demanding for parents with large families to cope with the challenges of adopting new parenting strategies. As one father said:

To implement new and modified parenting strategies we need the understanding and cooperation of all concerned citizens, neighbors, social and community workers, government officials, teachers and education authorities. -Somali father

One father group emphasized that they needed this type of cooperation because despite their determination to implement the modified parenting strategies still “there exists certain limitations and differences that might create grounds for misunderstanding because of difference cultural and religious backgrounds”.

There were often differences in reactions to modifications among participants from the same ethnic group, but on the whole, resistance to power reversals in families were seen mostly in Punjabi, Afghani, Somali, Serbo-Croatian and Central American immigrants. Punjabi, Serbo-Croatian and Mandarin cultures reported the equalization of mothers ‘and fathers’ roles in families. Parents of older children (born outside Canada) preferred having stronger control of their children than parents of younger children who showed more flexibility and indulgence.

There were also role changes between parents. Both mothers and fathers identified the process of immigration as having caused strains in their traditional parental roles.

Summary of Parenting Modifications

Most parents admitted that their methods, styles and attitudes towards parenting have undergone major changes with varying degrees depending on personal circumstances, individual experience, age of children and duration of stay in Canada. Generally mothers were more adaptive in changing parenting roles than fathers.

Immigrant parents resisted the power reversals in family roles. These related to children playing important, adult functions as translators, interpreters, negotiators or information providers. Yet most participants agreed that they did have to change a lot as parents. They needed to balance role reversals by equalizing relationships with their children and letting go of control.

Parents spoke of giving more freedom to their children since living in Canada. Parents who used to be strict and reactive towards children behaviour tried to be more lenient and proactive in their parenting strategies. However, parents of older children (born outside Canada) showed preferences to stronger control of their children than those having younger children (born outside or in Canada).

Some parents spent more time with children in Canada compared to time spent in their original countries. Reasons for this included: lack of employment and isolation in new

environment. Other parents, however spent less time with children in Canada. The reasons include: shift work, long hours at work, parents schoolwork and factors related to the independence of older children (i.e., children working after school).

Supports for Immigrant Parents

Towards the end of the focus group we asked participants what types of supports they as parents have used since coming to Canada. We also asked them what types of support are needed for immigrant parents. It was obvious that many participants were still trying to adapt to their new Canadian home. It was much easier for them to talk about the support that they still needed, than of the support they had already received.

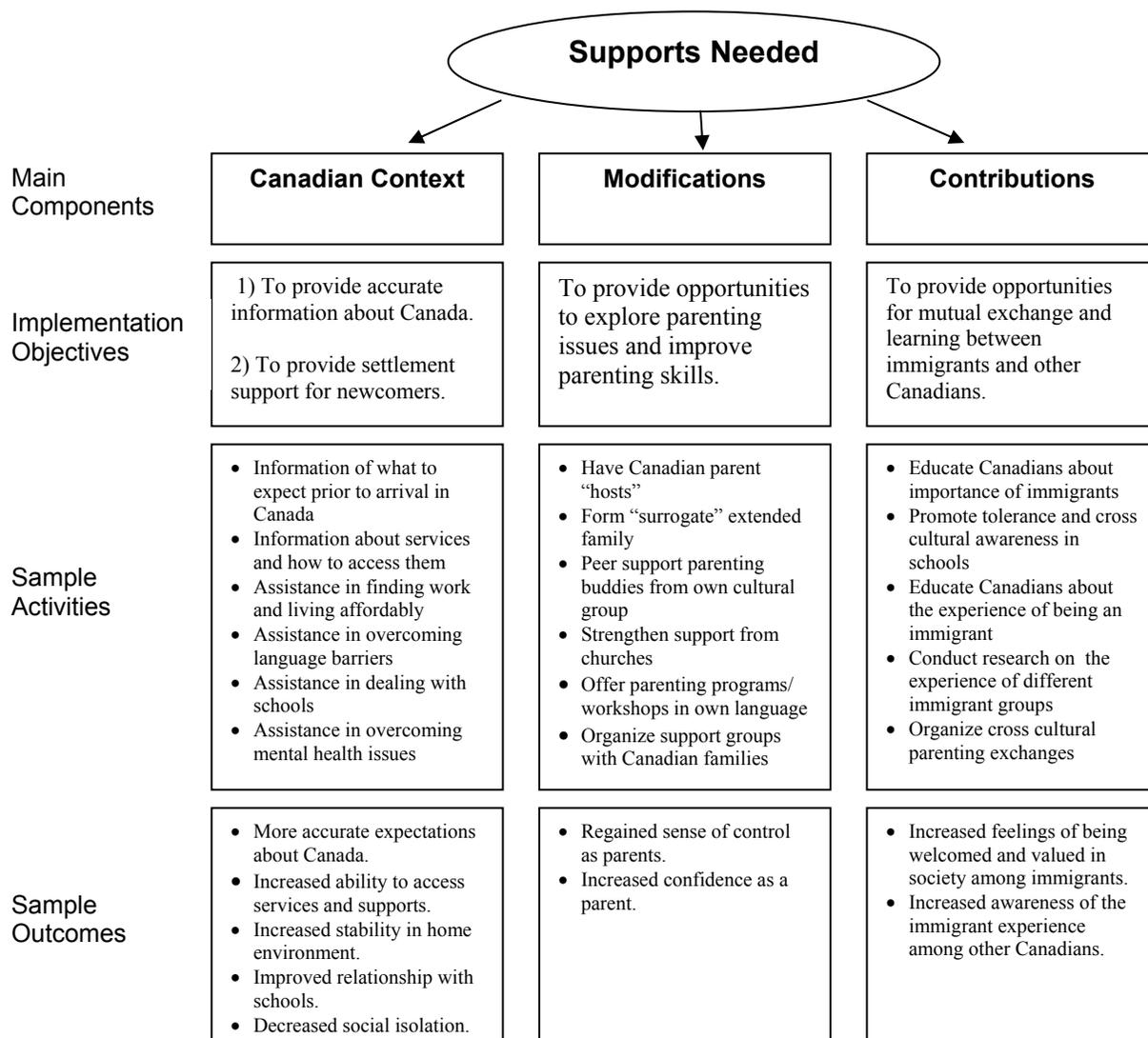
Participants who did identify having receiving support spoke of receiving help in two general ways. Some relied on formal support through the services provided by settlement workers or other professionals (e.g., day care teachers, family doctor, ESL teachers). The second method of support was less formal. These types of supports included help from local churches, relatives and family members (including their children), and members of their own ethnic community.

They expressed their satisfaction and gratitude with childcare benefits, free daycare in ESL schools, free bus tickets for school-aged kids, and parks for younger children. These all helped in organizing family life at their beginning in Canada. –Serbo-Croatian facilitator

As for supports that immigrant parents need, the responses by participants were much more forthcoming. For some participants, however, being asked how they could be supported by outside help was a new experience.

They themselves are very confused and are afraid to ask for help. They don't want strange people to know that they are having problems. Usually, in their home country all the problems were solved within the family. This was possible because they had many family and friends who they could rely on. Here, because they are alone, the help is necessary. –Serbo-Croatian facilitator

The diagram below summarizes their opinions. This diagram is in the form of a program logic model that identifies main component areas, implementation objectives, sample activities and sample outcomes. Notice that the three main components of support correspond to our immigrant parenting framework (i.e., Canadian context, modifications and contributions).



Supports in Dealing with the Canadian Context

The majority of suggestions made by participants dealt with helping immigrants settle within Canada. The general sentiment was that families able to successfully adapt to life in Canada would create a much better environment within which to raise children.

Having accurate information about the Canadian system was seen to be the first step. Participants from a number of groups complained about receiving inaccurate information about Canada in their home country. As a result their expectation about life in Canada had to be changed. For example, participants spoke about being led to believe that

making a lot of money in Canada was easy, or that they could find work in their field of professional training.

General orientation information was also needed after arriving in Canada. This type of information would help immigrants better understand the Canadian way of life. For many participants this way of life was so different from their own that they felt disorientated when coming to Canada. “When we come here,” said one participant, “we are like handicapped people.”

[There was a] lack of information about Canadian society. The fact that there is a big difference between Canadian society and Iranian society adds to their worries because they don't know what is exactly going on in other places outside of their home. –Iranian facilitator

Information about specific services and supports that could help newcomers was also needed. Participants felt that they needed information about a whole range of supports, from health care, schools and employment support to how to use public transportation and their legal obligations. Access to this information was needed beyond the initial first few weeks or months of arrival in Canada. As additional questions about life in Canada arose, participants wanted to know where to turn for help.

I feel I need help, but I don't know exactly what to do and where to go. –Iranian participant

Some parents expressed that they felt that Canada did offer immigrants many supports, but the problem was in knowing where to turn to for help. In the words of one participant, “the most important thing is to have the information to be able to access to those services.”

Yet other parents thought that problem was in the support system itself. They pointed out what they saw as limitations and gaps in settlement support, or in barriers to accessing existing supports. The list was long and can be summarized under the following headings:

1. Overcoming economic problems.

- job search support
- skills training
- better access to professions and trades
- foreign qualification recognition and accreditation
- money management
- proper/warm clothes for children
- fulfilling material demands of children
- assistance in acquiring sports equipment or learning material (e.g., computers)
- where to shop at reasonable prices
- hot meal at lunch time
- bus pass
- accessible/affordable day care (perhaps home daycare with someone from own language group)
- reduction of income tax
- finding affordable housing

“I cannot get a job in my profession. I don't get proper help from employment agencies in order to get a job in my profession. A lot of my problems regarding my children are related to my economics and income.” –Iranian

“Another important thing is childcare service, because it is very difficult to find a job without the language and is impossible to attend to an English school if you do not have day care service” – Central American participant

“We want our children to have the best of everything. But due to financial problems we cannot help them a lot.” -Afghani participant

2. Overcoming language barriers.

- English language training
- opportunities to speak English informally
- translation of service provider brochures
- services in own language
- personal document translation
- inexpensive interpreters

"Due to language barrier I can't help my kids with their homework, read the papers sent home, or communicate with their teachers." - Iranian participant

“It is hard to learn to speak English by only attending ESL classes. It would be very helpful if we could have English speaking friends to speak with” –Iranian participant

3. Dealing with the school system.

- Understanding the school system
- how to enroll children in proper classes
- more intensive ESL training in the schools
- finding after school programs for children
- tutoring support for children
- translation of school letters
- understanding/improving report cards
- helping children to make friends
- improving teacher/parent communication

“We are lost in the educational system. We need someone to teach us what the system is about.” - Mandarin participant

"It is hard for our children to make friends in schools. Other kids don't want to have anything to do with them and there aren't that many Iranian in each school. [More of an issue for 12-18 age group]." - Iranian participant

- have input into teaching curriculum and discipline standards
- understanding/improving teaching styles
- knowing how to choose a school
- organizing inexpensive social/recreational activities after school
- ESL summer schools particularly for high school students

“There should be certain language programs available for kids [in summer] so that they can learn before school starts. This is a major concern for high school kids, because often they lose a year or two just learning English and therefore fall behind.”- Serbo-Croatian participant

4. Overcoming mental health issues.

- cultural shock “survival strategies”
- coping with suspicion, hostility and discrimination
- accessing a health card
- breaking down social isolation

"We need help for our elderly...If they are staying alone they need help in choosing nutritious food, in being a friend to them. Some of them are very lonely and cannot go out." –Punjabi participant

Supports in Dealing with Parenting Modifications

Participants suggested another type of support. They wanted to learn how to grow as parents. They wanted support to help them explore parenting issues and improve their parenting skills.

This need for parenting support was recognized in part because of holding the focus group. Focus group facilitators commented on how the focus group served as a much-needed parenting discussion group. Sometimes the frustrations of being a parent surfaced. For example, some parents were frustrated with how to respond to a disobedient child, commenting that “these things are easier said than done”.

Yet reaching outside of their family for support was not natural for many immigrant parents. They felt caught between the realization that they needed help, their own social isolation, and little precedent in reaching out to community-based supports. This sentiment was well captured in the observation of one facilitator:

They themselves are very confused and are afraid to ask for help. They don't want strange people to know that they are having problems. Usually, in their home country all the problems were solved within a family. This was possible because they had many family and friends who they could rely on. Here because they are alone, the help is necessary. –Serbo-Croatian facilitator

Despite this natural reluctance to reach outside of the family for support, participants (particularly mothers) did express a desire for parenting supports. In part this suggestion for support was no different from any other parents in Canada wanting to learn how to be a better parent over time. For example, they wanted to learn from others about a wider range of disciplining approaches. They wanted to discuss with other parents about how to

adapt as parents, as children grow older. Or they simply wanted to break down their social isolation and interact with others who shared similar experiences as parents.

Many of these ideas for supports sounded like those already available to Canadian families through such initiatives such as the national Community Action Program for Children, the provincial Healthy Babies, Healthy Children program, or other parenting programs offered through local organizations. These types of supports provide a range of professionally led and mutual aid opportunities. In some cases they offer pre-packaged parenting courses (such as “Nobody’s Perfect”, “1-2-3 Magic”, or “Mother Goose”), while in other cases they offer informal support groups, one-to-one peer support, one-to-one professional support, or a lecture series.

Participants were generally not aware of these parenting supports available in the community. Yet they were looking for these types of supports, but in ways that were accessible to them. Accessibility usually meant having parenting support available in their own language, and in a safe environment that they trusted.

Chinese is a closed society. They only talk to the person they trust, especially about family matters. –Mandarin father

There was, however, another critical element to their request for parenting support. This element was unique to their experience as immigrant parents. Specifically, they wanted support through the process of parenting modifications; of understanding Canadian parenting ways, and how to adapt their own parenting approaches in ways that considered both Canadian society and their own values.

New types of parenting supports for immigrants were therefore needed. It was not just a matter of translating or having interpretation available for Canadian parenting programs. Parenting supports needed to address the issues of the immigration process on parenting (as outlined in the Canadian context and modifications sections of our report). The end result of these types of supports would be for immigrant parents to regain a sense of control as parents.

There were two general methods that participants suggested to support them through their process of parenting modifications. One approach was to connect them to families within their own ethnic community. The other approach was to connect them to other Canadian families.

Connections with families of same ethnic group

Participants from most groups suggested that being connected to other families within their ethnic group would help to better deal with the challenges of immigrant parenting. Sometimes the suggestion was to have parents themselves meet with other parents. At other times participants wanted to be connected with other parents and their children. In the words of one Punjabi mother, “Parents and youth should be given a forum to discuss issues they are faced with.”

Whoever the audience, participants saw a need to discuss their challenges with people going through the same experience. These types of discussions would support immigrants through the process of adapting to their new Canadian context.

It should be for both parents and children in order to familiarize them with proper parenting techniques used in Canada and especially on how to strike a balance between the rights of both parents and children. –Somali facilitator

Specific examples of potential supports included:

- Providing peer support “buddies” from parents within their own cultural group
- Offering parenting programs or workshops in their own language
- Forming ethno-specific discussion groups or clubs (e.g., the local Mandarin community has regular discussion groups for recent arrivals)
- Organizing parenting orientation sessions for recent arrivals

Connections with Canadian parents

Other suggestions focused on connecting immigrant parents with other Canadian parents. These strategies would serve to better orientate immigrants to Canadian ways of parenting. They would also provide a forum to begin to deal with their own parenting modifications.

Specific suggestions for supports included have Canadian parent “hosts”, forming “surrogate” extended families, organizing multicultural parenting support groups, and strengthening support received from churches. This view was strongest within the Mandarin and Serbo-Croatian group. Listen to some of their requests for interaction with Canadian parents.

We can not just stay within our own group. We should make connection to other Canadian’s parent. –Mandarin father

We need to learn more about [the] education system, how to find different service agencies and collect different information. [I’d] like to hear about other cultures’ parental experience.” –Mandarin father

The parents are usually sharing their problems with other parents who come from the same background. Even though this can be somewhat helpful, it still doesn't provide the information they need. How can they get good information from someone who is in the same position as themselves? This is not enough to help them become part of Canadian society. –Serbo-Croatian mother

We can share our experiences with others in Canada through discussions like this one. –Serbo-Croatian father

I wasn’t planning to come but I heard this is a good program, I am glad I came. This is a good chance to share experiences with people. If we can meet Canadian parents

and exchange the parenting experiences with them that will be more perfect. –
Mandarin father

Have someone who knows the native language help new immigrant family, then have
a Canadian family host them later.” –Mandarin mother

Supports in Facilitating Contributions to Canadian Society

The suggestions in the sections above centred around helping immigrants adapt to their new environment and to grow as parents. Yet we heard of another type of suggestion from participants which focused on how to encourage Canadian society to adapt to and welcome the reality of immigration. Whereas earlier we had talked about immigrants modifying their parenting approaches, now we move to supporting immigrants in modifying the Canadian context. In others words, supports are needed which help Canadians to learn and grow from the contributions that immigrant parents bring to Canadian society. In point of fact, participants seemed to welcome the opportunity to give back to the country that gave them new a new home.

They feel they could give back something to Canada and also have need for that,
but don't know how to do that. –Serbo-Croatian facilitator

The most frequent suggestion was to encourage Canadians to better understand and be more tolerant of other cultures. While the country needed immigrants, citizens of Canada generally were ill informed about the many ways that immigrants contribute to the country. Furthermore, parents told us that they did not feel that Canadians or Canadian institutions (such as the school system) understood the experiences and challenges immigrants face when coming to a new country.

This country is accepting us as a part of their society. I think they need to be
educated and informed to be more open and recognize immigrants as part of their
society. –Iranian participants

Teach Canadians how to be understanding and tolerant of other cultures. Some
Canadians are tolerant of other cultures, but most of them are ignorant about that.
–Somali participant

Specific suggestions to promote cross cultural awareness and tolerance included
organizing cross-cultural exchange events, having educational campaigns, and
conducting research on the settlement experience of different cultural groups. These
events should be targeted at both the government and the general public. What parents
were simply asking was to feel understood both as people, and as parents.

We have different culture, traditions and different religion. We need to be
understood by Canadian authorities. We have our own ways and methods of
parenting. –Somali participant

Participants also felt that Canadian parents could learn from the experience of immigrant parents. In fact, the final question we asked participants was how they thought parents from their background could contribute to other parents in Canada. Examples are summarized in the chart below.

Potential Contributions of Immigrant Parents

| Area of contribution | What Canadian families could learn |
|--|---|
| Behaviour of children | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children to be more polite • Children show respect towards elders • Children eat healthy (not so much fast food) • Children obey laws |
| How children care for parents and others | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children take care of parents when older • Children live with family even if older • Volunteer to help the most unfortunate in society • Help other immigrants to settle in Canada |
| Greater emphasis on education | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be more serious about primary education • School is more than place to leave children while parents work • Take an interest in children's education and learning |
| More directive role in parenting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be stronger with discipline • Be clearer on what children should and shouldn't do |

Parents called for more opportunities to have cross-cultural parenting exchanges. Most were very appreciative of the focus group as a forum to discuss parenting issues. But they would also welcome the opportunity to exchange experiences as parents in a more multicultural setting. A part of their motivation for requesting these cross-cultural parenting exchanges was to hear and learn how other parents in Canada dealt with parenting issues. But participants also wished for an opportunity to be able to share their own opinions, learnings and experiences as parents.

We can exchange experiences with others in Canada through discussions like this one. –Serbo-Croatian participant

Waterloo Conclusions and Recommendations

Our focus group discussions demonstrated that immigrants take their parenting role very seriously. They want to raise their children as morally upright and to be contributing members of society. They want their children to gain from the many opportunities that Canada has to offer, while still maintaining some of their own cultural and religious values.

Through our focus groups we learned about the challenges of immigration on parenting. Like other parents, immigrant parents need to learn and grow as parents through their children's developmental stages. But, immigrant parents have the additional challenge of parenting through the transitional process of adapting to a new home country. To complicate matters, they very often perceive Canadian views on parenting to be quite different from their own.

To illustrate this point consider immigrant parenting views on discipline. Study participants from all languages tended to have a strict approach to discipline. Parents exercised their power as adults to guide their children to know the difference between right and wrong. They saw this firm approach as being in contrast to the permissiveness of Canadian parents.

The process of immigration, however challenged their roles as parents. Power and role reversals between parents and children resulted as children were often quicker to learn English and Canadian culture, and thus to act as interpreters of language and society. The response of immigrant parents could be to further entrench their traditional need to control their children. Or they could (as many, particularly mothers, were beginning to do) respond by reframing their understanding of the parent/child relationship as being more equal, trusting and mutual, and by letting go of some of their control as parents.

Living in a different part of the world means adjustment, flexibility and being critical and open minded. The challenges of this type of transition can lead to strength and demonstrate resiliency (Beiser, 1998). And yet our findings show that recent immigrant parents also believe that they would benefit from support through this transition period. Supports could facilitate more positive outcomes for themselves as parents and for their families.

For many parents, being a participant of the focus group and the subsequent community forum already was a welcome intervention. They were grateful for an opportunity to finally be able to articulate heartfelt thoughts and feelings that were previously unspoken. Speaking to others helped them to begin to make sense of their evolving identity of being a parent in a new country.

Recommendations

When thinking of recommendations coming from our data two points became clear. Firstly, supporting immigrants parents meant supporting them as both immigrants and as

parents. Either one of these two identities could not be ignored as they were both intertwined. Secondly, we saw that supporting immigrants meant emphasizing that changes are needed with Canadian society. Canadian society (and Canadian parents) needed to recognize the value of immigrants and adapt to the resulting diversity.

We have therefore divided our recommendation section under three headings. One deals with supports to help immigrant families settle in their new home, another with supports in parenting. The third focuses on supports to facilitate greater awareness and tolerance of immigrant parents within Canadian society.

① Supports in Dealing with the Canadian Context

These recommendations focus on helping immigrants and their families settle within Canada.

General orientation

- Provide orientation package in home country detailing what immigrants can expect upon arrival in Canada.
- Provide information package (in own language) upon arrival listing existing local services and supports for immigrants.

Economic barriers

- Provide support in job search and skills training.
- Improve process of foreign qualifications recognition and accreditation.
- Provide support in money management and knowledge about affordable shopping practices.
- Provide accessible and affordable daycare for adult ESL students.
- Provide assistance in finding affordable housing.

Language barriers

- Provide opportunities to speak English outside of formal ESL classes.
- Provide inexpensive interpreters in order to access needed services.
- Provide affordable services for personal document translation.
- Translate brochures of local service providers into key languages.

School system

- Provide orientation sessions for parents about the local school system, including how to enroll children into schools and classes, understanding report cards, and avenues for parent involvement, and teaching/discipline approaches.
- Provide translation of school letters and communiqués into key languages, and provide cultural interpretation for parent/teacher interviews.
- Provide additional tutoring support for children (ESL and other curriculum)
- Encourage the active involvement of immigrant parents on parent councils.
- Provide ESL summer schools.
- Restore and expand social/recreational after-school opportunities.

- Expand school host programming and other cross-cultural befriending initiatives.

Mental health issues

- Expand host programming to increase the number of families involved.
- Provide other cross-cultural linking initiatives to reduce social isolation of immigrants.
- Provide educational and mutual aid opportunities to learn about and discuss challenges in cultural adaptation (e.g., dealing with culture shock and discrimination).

② Supports in Dealing with Parenting Modifications

These recommendations focus on helping immigrants learn and grow as parents.

Existing parenting supports

- Provide existing parenting programs in key languages (e.g., mentoring immigrant leaders to lead ethno-specific groups, using interpretation in multicultural settings).
- Translate existing parenting resources and materials into key languages.
- Increase promotion about existing parenting supports and increase outreach to immigrant parents (particularly fathers).
- Provide existing parenting programs in places of safety and trust (e.g., places of worship, community centre, respected community leader's home, etc.).
- Adapt content of existing parenting supports to recognize the challenges of immigration on parenting (i.e., acknowledge the process of parenting modifications: balancing their old country values and approaches with Canadian parenting ways).

New parenting supports

- Offer series of immigrant parenting workshops in key languages (e.g., orientation to parenting in Canada, dealing with intergenerational conflict, adapting to new parenting roles, parenting and schools, etc.).
- Initiate peer support parenting “buddies” initiative within ethnic communities (i.e., linking new arrivals with longer term arrivals).
- Form ethno-specific parenting discussion/support groups.
- Initiate parenting support groups/resources for immigrant fathers to address their specific issues.
- Initiate parenting host program matching Canadian and immigrant parents.
- Initiate “surrogate” extended family program (e.g., matching immigrant children with Canadian seniors).
- Initiate multicultural parenting support groups and parent/child drop-ins that include both Canadian-born and immigrant parents.

③ Supports in Facilitating Contributions to Canadian Society

These recommendations focus on promoting awareness and tolerance about the experience of immigrant parents within the broader Canadian society, and encourage mutual learning between immigrants and other Canadians.

- Educate Canadians about the importance and contributions of immigrants to Canadian society.
- Conduct public educational events relating the experiences of being an immigrant and an immigrant parent.
- Organize educational campaigns/initiatives promoting tolerance and cross cultural awareness in schools.
- Provide cross-cultural exchange parenting events.
- Conduct additional participatory action research on immigrant parenting (such as the present study) that involves the general public and mainstream service providers.

Appendices

- Provincial steering committee members
- Focus group protocol
- Participant demographic forms
- Community forum flyer
- Bibliography
- Waterloo Region fact sheets

Provincial Steering Committee Members

Connie Sorio, Toronto parent

Daniela Seskar-Hencic, Waterloo parent

Malika Cherif-Malik, Ottawa parent

Isabel Mahoney, Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants

Rebecca Dale, Citizenship and Immigration Canada

Joanna Ochocka, Centre for Research and Education in Human Services

Rich Janzen, Centre for Research and Education in Human Services

Paul Anisef, Joint Centre for Excellence for Research on Immigration and Settlement

Kenise Murphy-Kilbride, Joint Centre for Excellence for Research on Immigration and Settlement

Focus Group Protocol

Good morning/afternoon. I'd like to say that it's a pleasure to meet you and to have this opportunity to talk together. We've asked you to come here today to help us find out about what it is like to be a parent who has recently come to Canada; your beliefs, your parenting styles and concerns, as well as the supports you should have available to you. My colleagues and I are collecting similar information from 12 other language groups in 3 cities in Ontario. We are particularly interested in your experiences as mothers and fathers, and your views about parenting styles and issues regarding children of different ages and gender groups.

I. Introduction

Let's begin with introductions. Perhaps you can begin by sharing a little bit about yourself, your family, where you are from, and how long you have been here in Canada.

II. Parenting Orientation

Studying parenting is a complicated issue. As parents, we have our own beliefs, biases, and values which form our expectations of our children's behaviour and our hopes for their futures. Perhaps we can now move on to talking about what beliefs guide *you* as you raise *your* children.

I'd like to begin by asking you to recall your own childhood. Can you share with the group a favourite story or parental situation from when you were young that helped shape who you are today?

Over the years, you must have developed your own views about how you want to raise your own children. Can you tell me what beliefs guide you as you raise your children?

Probes:

What kind of qualities/values/attitudes do you want your children to develop?
What do you consider to be "good behaviour" for your children?

What aspirations or future goals do you have for your children?

Probes:

Are there any differences in your aspirations and future goals for the boys and girls in your family?

III. Parenting Styles

Now that we've talked about your parenting beliefs, I'd like to turn our discussion towards parenting styles. Parenting styles are how parents relate to and interact with their children. In other words, this is how you go about parenting.

How do you help your children reach the expectations you have for them?

Probes:

How do you let your children know what you expect (e.g., regarding school, peer involvement, interactions with extended family/neighbours, dating, etc.)?

How do you try to get your children to develop the qualities/values/attitudes and behaviours you want for them?

Which people (e.g., neighbours, relatives, friends) or institutions (schools, community centres, etc.) support you in this effort? Can you give us an example?

Are there certain people that make it more difficult for you? Can you give us an example?

Are there certain institutions that make it more difficult for you? Can you give us an example?

What do you do if these expectations are not met?

Probes:

How do you discipline your children between ages 0-5? Ages 6-13? Ages 14-18?

Are there any differences in the way you discipline the boys and girls in your family (e.g., with regard to issues at school, peer involvement, interactions with extended family/neighbours, dating, etc.)?

IV. Canadian Context

As immigrants coming to a new country, there are many different perspectives you encounter. For example, you may have noticed differences in parenting beliefs and styles between yourself and the people you have met since coming to Canada.

Do you think that the ways you think about parenting are similar to those that guide other families in Canada? In what ways? Can you give an example?

Probes:

Are there any similarities that pertain to your children between the ages of 0-5? Ages 6-13? Ages 14-18?

Are there any similarities that pertain to your daughters? Your sons?

When thinking about parenting in Canada, what surprised you about differences in your beliefs and styles from those of other families around you?

Probes:

Were there any differences that pertain to your children between the ages of 0-5? Ages 6-13? Ages 14-18?

Were there any differences that pertain to your daughters? Your sons?

4.3 In what ways, if any, has your children's behaviour changes as a result of living in Canada?

V. Modifications

When people move to a new place, they often find that they have to adjust to new ways which are different from their home country. In particular, we are interested in learning about some of the changes that you as parents have made since you came to Canada.

Do you think that your ideas about parenting have changed since you arrived in Canada? If yes, how?

Probe:

Did you feel pressure to make these changes?

Did you see these changes as being positive?

Has the age of your children had any effect on these changes?

Are there any changes in the way you parent your son(s) versus your daughter(s)?

Has your relationship with your children changed because of immigrating to Canada?

Probes:

In what ways?

What areas have stayed the same?

Have you noticed any changes in the way you parent boys versus girls?

Have you noticed any changes in the way you parent older versus younger children?

Can you provide some examples?

VI. Support for Immigrant Parents

Often as parents, we turn to others for advice and support. For example, we talk with neighbours, relatives, religious leaders, or other professionals.

Do you feel that you have needed help in parenting since coming to Canada? If so, in what areas?

Probes:

Whom did you turn to?

How long after you arrived did you turn to this support?

What was the outcome of this help?

6.2. In your opinion, what type of support is needed for immigrant parents?

Probes:

Looking back, what would have helped you?

Can you think of anything that is missing or unavailable to you right now that would be helpful to you?

Who is in the best position to provide this support?

6.3. What do you think parents from your specific background can contribute to other parents in Canada?

VII. Ending (Is there anything you would like to add?)

Thank you for your participation!

Demographic Information of Focus Group Participants

Group # _____ Age: _____

Please indicate the following information for each of your children:

| Child | Age | Gender | Where born? |
|-------|-----|--------|-------------|
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

What city do you live in now? _____

What is your country of birth? _____

What other countries have you lived in? _____

How long have you been in Canada: _____

Did you come to Canada as a (check one):
Refugee
Refugee Claimant
Immigrant
Other (please specify)

At the time you came to Canada, who were the people you already knew?

Language(s) spoken when you came to Canada: _____

Language presently used most frequently at home: _____

Highest level of education completed before coming to Canada: _____

Highest level of education completed in Canada: _____

If you are currently attending school, please complete the following information:



The Centre for Research and Education in Human Services

Please join us for...

A Celebration of New Canadian Families!

**Kitchener City Hall
200 King St. West
Thursday, March 8, 2001
6-9 pm**

- ✓ Hear about local research on what it's like to be an immigrant parent * **6:00-7:00** Free international food and displays
- ✓ Experience the multicultural diversity of Waterloo Region * **7:00-8:00** Presentation of research findings
- ✓ Learn about what types of parenting supports are available in our community * **8:00-9:00** Tour of organizational displays

☆ Free children's activities featuring **Ronno & the Lunchbag Lizard**

This event is sponsored by:

- ◇ Waterloo Region Community Health Department
- ◇ CAPC of Waterloo Region
- ◇ Citizenship and Immigration Canada
- ◇ Lutherwood Community Opportunities Development Association
- ◇ Canadian Mental Health Association

For more information about this event, please contact Purnima at 741-1318, or by email at **purnima@crehs.on.ca**.

Transportation reimbursement will be available. Please contact Purnima at 741-1318.

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FACT SHEET**Immigrant Parenting (Waterloo Findings)**

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Project Title:

Study on Parenting Issues
of Newcomer Families in
Ontario

Provincial Partners:

Joint Centre of Excellence
for Research on
Immigration and
Settlement, Ontario Council
of Agencies Serving
Immigrants, Multicultural
History Society of Ontario

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Funder:

Citizenship and Immigration
Canada

Purpose

- to explore the issues faced by immigrant parents within diverse ethnic backgrounds.
- to explore the supports and resources that could assist newcomer parents in addressing their parenting issues.

Overall Methodology

- Literature review
- Key informant interviews in Waterloo, Ottawa and Toronto
- Focus groups (Waterloo=14, Ottawa=12, Toronto=24)
- Individual Interviews (Toronto=48)

Waterloo Focus Group Participants

- Half of the groups were with mothers only, and half with fathers only
- 14 groups in 7 languages (Somali, Punjabi, Mandarin, Dari, Farsi, Serbo-Croatian, Spanish). Plus mother and father Polish pilot groups.
- Have been Canada 3 years or less
- Groups ranged in size from 5 to 9 participants (total=102 participants)

Focus Group Findings

1. Guiding values in parenting

- Respect others
- Importance of family
- Cultural values (all groups), and religion/language (some groups)

2. Hopes and aspirations for children

- Adopt good values
- Contribute to society
- Be healthy and happy
- Economic security/education

3. Parenting styles

- Parenting seen as a moral responsibility to teach children between right and wrong
- Emphasized need of parents to exercise control over children
- Mothers used more variety of discipline strategies than fathers
- Little differences among language groups in discipline approaches

4. Perceptions of Canadian parenting

- Major similarities: both immigrants and Canadians love their children
- Major differences: immigrants were stricter in discipline, had closer families, emphasized respect for elders, but did not give children as much independence
- Parents (particularly fathers) were critical of Canadian educational system

5. Changes made in parenting since coming to Canada

- Major changes in parenting were made across all groups
- Parents gave more freedom and were less strict with younger children
- Parents were more strict with older children born outside of Canada
- There was a resistance to power reversals between parents and children
- Mothers were more adaptive in changing parenting roles than fathers

6. Suggested supports

- Accurate information about Canada and other settlement support
- Opportunities to explore parenting issues
- Mutual exchange between immigrant parents and Canadian parents

7. Contributions of immigrant parents to Canadians

- Better behaviour of kids
- More emphasis on education
- Children to care for parents and others
- More directive role in parenting