

Study on Parenting Issues of Newcomer Families in Ontario



Report on Key Informant Interviews

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April 30, 2001

This report is one of seven reports written for a federal research study entitled:

*Study on Parenting Issues of
Newcomer Families in Ontario*

This research study was completed by:



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This research study was funded by:



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Immigration Canada**

**Citoyenneté et
Immigration Canada**

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The opinions and views expressed in this study are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the opinions and views of CIC, OASIS.

**Results of the Key Informant Interviews
Study on Parenting Issues of Newcomer Families in Ontario
Prepared by the MHSO
April 30, 2001**

Acknowledgements: Interviews were conducted by Dr. Annie Cheung, Victor Marcuz, Dr. Lillian Petroff, Dr. Marcia Rodriguez and Lalita Sood.

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Review of the Key Informant Interviews

Introduction:

This report reviews the results of interviews conducted with twenty-four (24) key informants working in services, organizations, schools or agencies that have expertise concerning parenting issues immigrants face and the existing supports from the perspective of these groups, as they relate to newcomers. To explore variations around the province of Ontario interviews were conducted with front-line key informants in the Greater Toronto Area, Kitchener-Waterloo and Ottawa-Carleton. The key informants worked in six sectors or service domain areas: 1) health and mental health; 2) education (ESL teachers, Directors and Superintendents); 3) welfare; 4) legal; 5) family support; and 6) settlement workers. The term "newcomer" indicates that the principle concern of this study was to investigate issues related to immigrants/refugees who have arrived in Canada within the last three years. This time restriction required that researchers make special inquiries regarding newcomers from the following source areas that according to CIC-OASIS figures were the most significant subgroup arrivals: China, Sri Lanka, India, Philippines, Afghanistan, Iran, Russia, Somalia and the Former Yugoslavia.

It should be noted that the term "newcomer" because of its temporal dimension masks the complexity of differences inherent in such categorization. "Newcomers" do not only include categories of people distinguished by their legal status such as immigrants, refugee claimants, and illegal immigrants but also necessarily combines people of different ages, genders, places of origin, ethnicities/races and classes. To that end, special consideration was given to the selection of key informants who could speak to the issues with an awareness of these other dimensions. Throughout the report the terms newcomer and immigrant will be used interchangeably as the general terms to apply to this aggregate of people and other terms will be used to highlight the specific needs of a sub-category as indicated by the key informants. It is also worth mentioning here that several key informants, although aware of the need for some distinction, were uncomfortable with the term "newcomer" since in their view it could imply a hierarchy of worth and/or rights based on longevity of settlement in Canada.

The objective of the qualitative in-depth interviews was to gather information from workers who have expert, front-line experience about issues faced by newcomer parents from diverse ethnic backgrounds. The questions also examined the supports and resources that were available or absent that could assist newcomer parents in addressing parenting issues. These interviews are one component of a larger, three-tiered project aimed at understanding the issues facing newcomer parents. The other components include newcomer parent focus groups and individual interviews with newcomer parents.

Methodology

The Sample

Twenty-four interviews were conducted with key informants from a variety of professional fields working with newcomer parents. These interviews were conducted in three urban centres: Toronto (GTA -12), Kitchener-Waterloo (5), and Ottawa-Carleton (7).

The sample of key informants was developed in three ways. First, a preliminary list of names of potential key informants was obtained from the project working-group for Toronto and Kitchener-Waterloo. Second, the Multicultural History Society of Ontario (MHSO) drew on its community-based members for referrals in all three urban settings, especially in Ottawa-Carleton and Toronto. Third, researchers at the MHSO contacted potential key informants and solicited additional names to complete the sample.

At the beginning, the sample included a distribution of key informants in all the six sectors noted above. Three issues emerged through the actual process of arranging and conducting interviews. First, our rate of refusal was over 50%. This high rate of refusal was a direct result of the fact that many of the key informants identified worked in front-line positions/services that survived with limited resources in terms of labour, time and money. A second reason for refusal mentioned by potential key informants was that they had participated in previous government-sponsored assessment projects and had the perception that their participation and suggestions did little to change the problems in the system. To many of those who refused participation, an hour was used more profitably helping a newcomer parent or child than sitting for an interview. Third, similar to the experience of Day (1999)¹, it should be noted that even when key informants worked in particular domains, their comments ranged over issues pertinent to more than one domain. As Day indicates this overlap makes it more difficult to analyze the data on a sector specific basis. However, it is also symptomatic of an important component of the work done by these people. The immense pressures confronted by front-line workers necessitate an expansive knowledge base to try to respond to the varied needs of newcomers.

A list of the agencies and organizations represented among the key informants is presented in appendix A of this report. It is divided according to the three urban centres.

¹ Day, David. 1999. **Identifying Services, Gaps in Service, and Best Practice Models for Newcomer Youth in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA): Results of a Survey of Key Informants.** Toronto

The Protocol (questions):

The questionnaire was developed by researchers at the MHSO with the advice of Dr. Kenise Murphy Kilbride and Dr. Paul Anisef. The questions were created to identify a range of issues as they pertained to three age ranges for children (0-5, 6-13, 14-18), the gender of parents and children, and the different experiences based on ethnic/racial identity. The major issues under investigation here were to identify: (a) the major issues facing immigrant parents (b) the range of existing services for immigrant parents and their effectiveness; (c) the key problems immigrant parents confront in accessing services; (d) the forms of evaluation used to assess their services to immigrant parents; (e) the gaps in services and the areas of unaddressed needs; (f) ways in which the different sectors might improve their services. The Protocol was further field tested in the early phase of interviewing and researchers were encouraged to adapt the framework to best fit the sector in which the key informant worked. These qualitative interviews were open-ended. In practice, researchers found that during the qualitative interviews the informants anticipated and elided some questions. A copy of the Key Informant Protocol is provided in Appendix B.

Questions #1, #2 and #7 addressed the difficulties immigrant parents faced generally and with the specific service or organization in which the key informant worked. Question #3 identified what services key informants offer at their workplace. Questions #4 and #5 consider issues of effectiveness including how the age, gender and ethnicity of the parent or child influenced the success of the services. Question #6 elicited reasons why certain services work well. Questions #8 and #9 identified tools and forms of evaluation used by services to consider whether they are achieving their desired outcomes. Question #10 identified gaps or barriers in the services to immigrant parents. Question #11 asked key informants for opinions about how to better serve immigrant parents. Finally, Question #12 identified anything significant to the theme of the project that had been overlooked in the previous questions.

Fieldwork:

Researchers telephoned potential key informants to arrange meetings at mutually convenient times. A total of five researchers conducted interviews. One researcher focused on key informants in Ottawa. Two researchers interviewed key informants working in Kitchener-Waterloo. Three researchers conducted interviews in Toronto. The interviews ranged in length from between forty-five minutes to three hours. Twenty-one interviews were conducted in person. Three were conducted by telephone to key informants in Kitchener-Waterloo. Most often the interviews occurred during the formal workday or shortly after in the early evening between 5pm and 7pm. Researchers considered tape recording the interviews and this was done for six of the interviews. This was not

possible for all of the interviews for a variety of reasons. 1) the key informant declined to be taped; 2) the interview site was not hospitable to sound recording; 3) the interview was conducted over the phone. For each interview, researchers made notes that summarized the key informant's response to the questions.

Results

The results are presented in eight sections. This division corresponds roughly to the thematic division of questions in the Protocol noted above. An introductory section addresses some overall observations as it pertains to the interview responses as a whole. For each section, the main themes and issues raised by informants are identified. In most cases, these themes are illustrated by examples from the specific interviews. Direct quotations taken from the interviews are indicated in italics but the anonymity of the source is maintained.

Overall observations:

Four overall themes emerged from the key informant interviews that should be addressed before beginning a more specific presentation of the findings in the areas of concern. One of these themes is a result of the actual interview process and it will be addressed first. The other three are related more specifically to the issues immigrant parents face and the issues that sector or domain area workers and organizations face in trying to respond to the needs of these parents. They will be distinguished here for the purposes of clarity but it should be noted that they are at times interrelated.

First, although it was hoped that the method used - qualitative interviews - would elicit subtle and nuanced answers from key informants, researchers found an **inconsistent level of responsiveness** and detail from key informants. Some key informants addressed the issues in general terms whereas others were very specific about programs and access issues. This distinction can be further drawn out in terms of the specific domain areas within which key informants worked: either ethnospecific work or the issues immigrant parents face were an indirect or one of many concerns of the organization. For example, informants worked in organizations that served particular ethnic communities such as Chinese, Jewish, Somali or (ex)-Yugoslav. Others were in organizations whose clientele was multiethnic. In contrast, there were others in organizations that served parents indirectly such as educators and police officers.

Second, there was a significant concern that **sustainable funding levels** were not sufficient to meet the needs on the front lines. In fact, it was mentioned by a few key informants that they wished to raise this issue but understood that some could summarily dismiss it. This was stated because of their impression that the current ideological regime at different levels of government seemed more interested in cuts or if not cuts at least following the hackneyed dictum that asked the broader public sector to *do more with less*. Informants noted also that the

one-time or annual grant system limited the ability for an agency or organization to make long range plans and it had the unfortunate collateral effect of demoralizing staff members who are worried about employment security.

In an effort to make up for budget short-falls or to provide a required matching contribution required by some granting agencies or programs some organizations have turned to fund-raising. This was seen as a less than desirable alternative because fund-raising activities take up a great deal of administrative time. It is clear that the lack of sufficient funding has specific consequences for immigrant parents and those who wish to serve their needs, directly or indirectly.

A few examples here will illustrate the issue from a couple of different domains. In the area of education, the York Region Board of Education in the northeast of the GTA has only one Chinese-language translator on staff despite the significant settlement of Chinese in the eastern part of the Board. This particular example illustrates the interrelated nature of limited funding or, at a minimum, different funding priorities and institutional biases in the school system as it relates to immigrants. *“Many teachers and administrators still tell new immigrant kids not to speak their home language in the schoolyard. I think this is ridiculous. These kids have enough issues; let’s at least get them to express themselves with their friends. English will come.”*

In this specific case, the worker’s language skills are limited to Cantonese. This language skill limits her ability to adequately communicate with Chinese-speaking parents and children who use different dialects, especially newcomers from northern China who speak mainly Mandarin. She services approximately 138 schools (115 elementary and 23 secondary - the Board is growing). Her duties include translating at parent/teacher interviews, preparing a newsletter for all schools about issues facing immigrant parents and children, assisting with the identification of special needs children and providing in-service workshops for teachers and administrators. Of course, in practice this is impossible, so very often children are translating for parents, which creates its own problems beyond the potential incomplete relay of information, especially the potential social and psychological problems attendant in role reversals in power relations between child and parent. Similarly, everyday information from schools required for parents to make an informed choice about their children’s future is unavailable.

In the area of service providers working in community centres, the lack of sustainable funding levels limits the ability of workers/organizations to offer ESL, child care or parenting classes, for example, at flexible times most useful for immigrant parents. Resources do not permit most centres the time/labour to offer evening classes that fit with the work demands of immigrant parents.

Third, key informants identified **publicity and/or coordination between providers** as interrelated issues that needed to be more fully addressed so that services that do exist were made accessible to the parents who needed them.

Key informants stressed that access to services by immigrant parents was often attained through social networks, or as one informant said echoing another, *“Word of mouth brings us most of our clients, but I am sure that means many people don’t know about us.”* The inability to get the message out there to people in the community who need the services was linked to the related theme of insufficient funding.

Fourth, unsurprisingly, a theme that emerged throughout the interviews was the impact of several key social dimensions on an immigrant parent's ability to access help: **ethnicity and/or ethnic categorization, gender, and class**. Related to this theme, of course, is the issue of **equity**. Six key informants identified **systemic barriers** that limit the chances of people, based on ethnicity, race or cultural heritage. These barriers include for example the lack of literature or services in the home **language** of immigrant parents. This fact therefore limited their ability to access services, fully comprehend options, make informed decisions for their children and, in effect, empowered Canadian-raised or -born children to taken traditional parental authority roles thereby creating room for potential intergenerational conflict. Another concern noted was the frustration foreign-educated immigrants have with their inability to perform the jobs they were trained for in their country of origin as a result of professional requirement barriers here in Canada. Finally, as it pertains to ethnicity and race what key informants mentioned was the encounter with **everyday discrimination** immigrant parents face at some service domains, in stores, or on the street because of their accents, skin colour, religious practices, styles of clothing etc. Several key informants working with Chinese newcomers stressed the need to think of **ethnicity as complex** because of the variety of peoples who are categorized by institutions and public culture under monolithic, homogenous labels. In particular here it was mentioned that there were significant differences between immigrants from northern and southern China in terms of language, educational levels, labour skills and class and status expectations.

Gender was a frequent concern of informants as well. Consistently it was articulated by key informants that they were working mostly with women/mothers in parenting classes and wished they had ways to respond to the needs of men. One informant who works in a community health centre noted that *“mostly mothers attend our parenting groups. Sometimes we can reach fathers by setting up programs in ESL classes but male participation is low if it is done in the community centre.”* Another informant working in Better Beginnings Better Futures noted most of her clients were women because *“fathers often leave because of the lack of employment or stress. Men often suffer from role confusion, a loss of identity and self-esteem within the family.”* There is a double burden on women because they often are working and coping with the issues of parenting. Equally, other informants noted that *“women often don’t attend ESL classes because of the lack of childcare.”*

Major issues or problems faced by immigrant parents:

This section examines the main problems or issues that immigrant parents face as identified by key informants. These problems were identified with respect to three age cohorts of children: 0-5, 6-13 and 14-18. In general, five general features recurred similar to those mentioned in the study's literature review:

- 1) practical settlement issues
- 2) role reversals between child and parent leading to social conflict;
- 3) social isolation and the loss of self-esteem,
- 4) economic insecurity and poverty,
- 5) cultural disjunctures between parents' expectations for their children and those of Canadian public culture.

These pressures are exacerbated because many newcomers arrive from societies in which extended kin were available for support. These problems are often further exacerbated for single parents.

Age cohort 0-5:

- finding daycare offered in conjunction with ESL classes
- finding out where and how to get information about services
- parental expectations in Canada, i.e. often parents are unaware of the legalities/parameters of disciplining acceptable in Canada.
- behavioral expectations of children i.e., in a daycare setting, maintaining a nutritious, balanced diet for their children using 'Canadian food' so as not to embarrass their children in front of fellow students and some educators by sending home-cooked ethnic food to school.

Age cohort 6-13

- Parents experience the same issues as noted above with the age cohort 0-5.
- Many parents coming from states with authoritarian regimes such as the former Soviet Union fear the state/government and its institutions such as police and social services.
- Many parents are threatened by children's saying that any form of discipline is abuse. In general, disciplining becomes more difficult as,
 - a) children are better able to communicate in English over time, whereas often the parents' English language skills progress much slower or seemingly not at all.
 - b) parents feel dis-empowered and embarrassed because they find themselves jobless or with a job which does not garner respect from their children and society.
 - c) parents feel frustrated because they lack the economic resources to access recreational facilities for this age group.

- d) parents feel detached and disconnected as children develop relationships outside the home i.e. friends and the parents cannot engage due to lack of language ability.
- e) parents feel frustrated and disappointed as the children question and/or reject their home culture and language.
- f) parents are worried about the influence of television on their children. Since they are uncomfortable with English they are uncertain what is being watched.
- g) parents want information about schools but it is difficult to access because of language barriers.
- h) parents feel unsure and worried as pre-teens want independence and engage in non-traditional behaviors, i.e. talking to the opposite sex on the phone, dating.

Age cohort 14-18

- Parents experience the same issues as noted above with the age cohort 6-13 (points a-h).
- Relationships between parents and child(ren) become strained as:
 - a) parental versus child's educational values are not consistent, i.e. child wishes to work outside the home to buy material goods that matter to their sense of identity and inclusion in greater society, parents desire that time to be spent studying.
 - b) parental versus child's family values are not consistent i.e. child desires to spend time with friends/girlfriend/boyfriend, parents wish child to spend time with the family.
 - c) child seeks advice outside the community- i.e. child talks to teachers, counselors, friends and not with parents.
 - d) child confronts failures, i.e. many immigrant teenagers have a lot of difficulty finding part-time employment since they may not have the prerequisite experience expected for their age, references or the knowledge-base to apply for jobs and/or write résumés.
 - e) the reversal of traditional roles with children is most prominent in this age cohort. As one informant stated, the children often use role reversal styles of interaction to attempt *to control parents*. They use their mastery of the Canadian "cultural system" *to mock parents*. They do not always give their parents a truthful accounting of the ways of Canada or sometimes they withhold information.

Not surprisingly, when researchers asked key informants to consider the problems that immigrant parents face within the context of the gender and ethnicity of parent or child, the most salient features to be mentioned had to do with equity and access, disjunctures between immigrant cultural expectations

and experiences in Canada and stereotypes immigrants encountered at institutions.

Gender:

- a) **Discipline difficulties and blame:** If within the home culture there is an expectation that one gender is primarily responsible for disciplining and rearing the children that person is blamed for any difficulties with children that occur during the settlement process and seen as a failure by the spouse and community. In nearly all cases discussed with informants this difficulty was one faced by women, although disciplinary responsibilities were sometimes shared.
- b) **Challenges to traditional gender roles:** If parents find themselves in untraditional roles, i.e. for males, accompanying their children to daycare when they feel that they should be working.
- c) **Stereotyping:** If official at public institutions or the public culture makes judgements about their intentions and behaviours based on common misconceptions about their cultural practices.
- d) **Equity and access:** If they feel that their spouse and/or prejudice within the host society is not allowing them to adjust and adapt to Canadian society in seeking opportunities i.e. employment.

Ethnicity:

- a) **Stereotyping:** If workers at service agencies and schools do not fully understand and cope poorly with different cultural/religious practices:
 - Women wearing the hijab are sometimes viewed by non-Muslims as being dominated by their husbands. Moreover, there is the mistaken assumption that women wearing the hijab are uneducated and so they are not involved and/or included in the decision-making process in schools.
 - Children who read/learn the Koran for significant periods of time in the evening (it can be 1 to 2 hours) are viewed by some educators as showing insufficient attention to responsibilities to schoolwork.
- b) **Equity and ethnic/racial stereotypes** directly or indirectly contribute to making it more difficult to find a well-paying job. This can affect the financial and emotional circumstances of the family.
 - Key informants working with immigrant parents at community centres noted that Somali women as doctors and lawyers found it impossible to find employment not only in their area of qualification but in any capacity. The Somali women felt that this was due to choice of wearing their traditional Somali clothing and their accents.

- c) **Equity and language access:** If the agency or school has not responded to the presence of different cultures and languages in the surrounding community by advertising in different languages, providing translators, translating forms and information and understanding the needs of the community:
- A group of Spanish-speaking women in a community centre in northwest Toronto wished to meet one another socially to share information informally. The agenda of the centre's facilitator was to offer sessions that focused on providing information about such topics as nutrition, discipline, and financial management. After a few sessions, the group told the facilitator that they would let her know if and when they needed to know about specific topics - they just needed a place in which to meet to share experiences. The facilitator responded to the needs of the group by providing them with the space to meet one another informally at the community centre.

Existing Services:

This section highlights services available to immigrant parents as identified by key informants.

- Daycare where qualified Early Childhood Education Workers are employed and care for children, i.e. Randall Public School in the YRBE.
- Drop in centres where parent and/or guardians can bring their children and/or a specified number of children to use the play facilities and share or borrow toys, to allow their children to socialize, and to socialize themselves with other parents and perhaps share information about the community services offered.
- Language programs for new immigrants - ESL classes sometimes in conjunction with daycare, i.e. The Language Instruction for New Canadians Program (LINC), i.e. Waterloo District School Board noted its effectiveness because parents do not need to make a choice between caring for kids or ESL classes.
- The Host program matches refugee and newcomer families with Canadian families to ease the settlement process, i.e. noted for its usefulness by a Health Promotion Officer in the Region of Waterloo.
- Programs to enhance community development, settlement services, integration services and social services; i.e. at the Jane and Finch Centre provides individuals and groups with office space and support, to assist them to become self sufficient in their pursuit of employment opportunities. Assistance is provided for learning skills such as writing résumés, accessing faxes, typing minutes, managing finances and understanding management.

The University Settlement Recreation Centre (Toronto) offers a **newcomer's package** including information on how to apply for SIN and Health cards and how to use transit, the local education system, and obtain housing etc.

- Programs to enhance health care - Healthy Babies, Healthy Children, sponsored by the province include home visitations by lay people and nurses. Other programs at the centre often involve qualified personnel and focus on mental health issues, involving social and recreational programs; prenatal care; and physical health, involving nutritionists, nurses, doctors, and dentists. For example, the South-East Ottawa Centre for a Healthy Community offers prenatal classes, breastfeeding support and workshops instructing mothers how to make nutritional, inexpensive baby-food at home.
- Programs for women - i.e. violence prevention programs, parenting workshops and tiny tots programs for parents.
- Programs that offer a peer to give support, information and advice about resources to families with preschool children about parenting issues, access to community resources and skills development, i.e. the Family Visitor Program at the Ottawa, Better Beginnings Better Futures.
- Informal groups for parents to allow parents to share common experiences and information to help them learn about services i.e. workshops, classes, day-cares, schools, doctors, housing.
- Ottawa police officers have organized a program called "Kids in the hood" to help foster friendships between neighbourhood kids, their parents and police. The Toronto Police Service has a youth bureau and the ProAction program (see below).

Limitations to effectiveness of programs:

Key informants consistently regarded their specific programs as effective as far as they went. As one noted, at a minimum, the centre at which she worked organized *“cross-cultural parenting groups that become a safe forum for parents to express their feelings without anyone judging accents.”* In general, key informants were critical of the demands not being met by current programs because of funding/staffing limitations.

The services are limited in their ability to adequately meet the needs of their community:

- a) **Reduced funding has led to a reduction in the number of programs offered.**
- For example, the Jane and Finch Centre used to run workshops to bring members of the community (i.e. police, family services) to teach workers specialized skills, since some parents had expressed concern that counselors lacked sufficient knowledge. Funding cuts, however, have forced the elimination of these programs.
- b) **Reduced funding has led to a reduction in the number of full time community centre workers.**
- For example, several settlement centres do not offer many evening programs due to the lack staff necessary and required to keep the centre open. Local community groups and individuals have stressed the need for evening programs for new immigrants since the day is spent seeking employment, in retraining and/or working.
 - For example, in Ottawa the Somali Centre for Family Services has been unable to offer continuity in its programs because government funding models have offered only one-time grants – *“too much hiring and firing.”*
- c) **Inflexible funding models do not adequately service the real on-the-ground needs of communities.**
- For example, an abused woman, newly arrived to Canada, arrived at a community/social centre in northwest Toronto in a crisis situation seeking help. The centre could not meet her needs directly. Nor could separate avenues of funding be established in order to assist her in a responsible manner. Government officials told the executive director that her centre, not being a settlement centre, was ineligible to receive funding for settlement.

The role of gender, age and ethnicity of parent as a factor limiting access or helpfulness of services:

Gender:

- a) At most centres, programs focused on parenting are offered specifically for women, because women are usually the primary caregivers.
- b) The woman's role as primary caregiver often inhibits her own access to courses such as ESL because of time constraints.
- c) The need for violence-prevention programs dictates specific programs for women to inform them of their options.

Age:

Programs offered by centres do not differentiate by age of the parent:

- a) For example, at the Parkdale Centre, many Chinese primary caregivers are grandparents who drop in and frequent the centre more often than their children (the parents) do.

- b) Some newcomer parents believe "connections" give you access and find it hard to believe services are open to all in need.

Ethnicity:

Programs offered by centres do not differentiate by ethnic groups, unless of course it is an ethnospecific community centre where services are more easily accessible to people of the same ethnicity.

Two general points mentioned by several informants should be noted. First, counter to the image portrayed by some in politics or the media, newcomers are reluctant to access services because they do not want to appear greedy or needy. Many resist seeking services until they become really desperate. They do not feel entitled to these services.

Second, refugees confront particular problems as a result of involuntary migration and trauma. Not enough services adequately address the needs of refugees.

Services that work well and why:

Most informants believed that services needed to be flexible and to respond to the changing needs of the community. There were three variables that recurred among respondents for insuring useful services:

- a) **Newcomer packages and holistic programs:** Programs that address the challenges of everyday living and coping in a new society ease the settlement process immensely. For example, a course in understanding the school system would be very useful.
- b) **Flexible times** are required for course offerings. The timing of classes is crucial. Parents desire language classes in the evenings. Furthermore, classes need to be offered more than once during the week.
- c) Workers with **multiple language skills** and more frontline workers from the newcomer/immigrant groups are required to convey information provided at program sessions. Key informants from all service domain areas or sectors called for, at a minimum, an increase in the availability of translators. Most felt that workers with multiple language skills would be even more effective. There was one informant who worked in Ottawa for the Children's Aid Society who expressed concern about working with co-ethnics. While sensitive to the language he cautioned that sometimes immigrant parents of his same cultural/ethnic heritage had unrealistic expectations of him believing he was "on their side". Once he explained the CAS rules parents often feel betrayed.

It was also mentioned by four informants that their organizations tried as best they could to offer as many services as possible - a holistic approach - in order to

see the client/parent as a complete person and therefore to better respond to his/her specific needs. For example, several agencies offered counseling support and daycare with language training and settlement services.

Several programs noted for their effectiveness are:

- The LINC program (federally funded) is successful because it offers a stimulating daycare program for kids while mother/parents, etc. attend the LINC ESL program.
- Community Action Program for Children, Waterloo Region, especially play therapy programs for young victims of the civil wars and forced relocation.
- The Host program, matches refugees and newcomer families with Canadian families and it is seen as a good program for refugees. It serves to demonstrate what the average Canadian parent expects from his/her children.
- Jewish Family Services in Ottawa was noted for its efforts to increase cross-cultural understanding between different immigrant and ethnic groups. It mentors the Somali Centre for Family Services and has dealt with conflicts and misunderstandings between Jews and Muslims in Ottawa.
- The Jewish Immigrant Aid Society (JIAS) in Toronto was cited as effective because it offers a comprehensive variety of programs, including ESL classes, a speakers' program, and advice to parents on the appropriate use of discipline, on Canadian law, and on the work and jurisdiction of the Children's Aid Society and other service agencies.
- The Settlement and Education Project in Toronto (SEPT) is on-site in schools. Community resettlement workers help register children at school, walk them "through the day," and help them to learn times-tables, etc.
- The Multilingual Access Program (MAP) provides volunteers to go with clients to school or doctor appointments, thereby helping to lower the dependence of parents on their children.
- The "Kids in the hood" police program in Ottawa and the ProAction program of the Toronto Police service is supported by corporate donations and administered by a civilian body. Police can apply for funds to take youth groups on outings to cultural events. It reduces the fear many newcomers have of policing authorities based on well-founded experiences in their home of emigration.
- H.E.L.P. (Healthy Emotion Loving Parents) is a support program for parents to help reduce the stress of parenting.
- Healthy Babies, Healthy Children, sponsored by the province, includes home visitations by lay people from specific immigrant/ethnic communities and nurses.

Indicators and measurements used by the key informants in their organizations/centres/schools to evaluate the effectiveness of their interaction with immigrant parents on parenting issues:

- a) All respondents used some form of evaluation but because of the lack of funding, staff and time to administer these tools, feedback was incomplete. As one informant noted. *“We’re busy all the time so we must be doing something right.”*
- b) Eight of the respondents, corresponding to those working in the social service/ settlement organizations, said their organization regularly used **questionnaires and/or evaluation forms** to monitor services. These evaluation tools are often tied to funding programs from government.

For the rest, a combination of the following were used when labour and time permitted:

- verbal feedback
- suggestion boxes
- follow-up random phone calls
- informal observation

There are exceptions:

- Better Beginnings Better Futures /South-East Ottawa Community Health Centre through its Family Visitor Program holds community forums and to ask users about issues of effectiveness and satisfaction with services. In its 6-month status report it analyzes the needs in the community and the effectiveness of its programs.
 - The Women's Health Centre (St. Joseph's Health Centre) asks for verbal and/or written evaluations from clients and social service agencies and other referral groups. The Centre also has a suggestion/opinions box. The Centre has recently conducted a comprehensive survey of its entire list for the two-year period (1997-99).
- c) Some centres are currently developing tools with the aid of hired consultants in order to meet the criteria required to obtain funding:
 - For example, the Jane and Finch centre is developing a "logic model" to use as a measurement tool to evaluate the effectiveness of the programs. The model consists of verbal feedback and observations.

None indicated that their forms of evaluation or measurement took into account the key dimensions of age, gender and ethnicity of the parents and children. This may be in part because funding is not available to provide a range of specific evaluative tools.

Gaps and/or barriers in service for immigrant parents:

As stated previously, the respondents identified a number of gaps in services. They are summarized below:

- 1) Not enough ESL classes are offered and those in place are not available when needed most - in the evenings.
- 2) Insufficient information is provided to immigrants prior to coming to Canada, especially concerning the likelihood of their finding employment in their area of qualification.
- 3) More help is needed in learning to navigate the social system
 - health care (finding a doctor, using a hospital)
 - schools (paperwork required to register their child, the need to bring a translator)
- 4) Help is needed in developing and maintaining job-search skills – how and where to search
- 5) Immigrant parents often are unprepared for the expense of living in Canada
- 6) Immigrant parents often are unprepared for the weather.
- 7) Immigrant parents often are unprepared for the feelings of loneliness and isolation.
- 8) Programs need to be offered in more flexible time frames - length, day and time of day.
- 9) There is a lack of culturally sensitive programs; parents don't feel safe.
- 10) Proactive programs instead of reactive ones, developed with the help of communities, would benefit newcomer parents.
- 11) An inadequate number of programs for refugees, victims of war and violence/trauma are available; they are crucial.

Additional concerns:

Three informants mentioned an area of concern that they felt required more attention. And that was the difficulty refugee parents and children face in the settlement process because of the traumatic experiences they have had.

“We must be aware of emerging groups/people, such as the arrival of a growing number of French-speaking refugees from Burundi and Rwanda.”
(KI - St. Joseph's Health Centre, Toronto)

“A story of the effects of the horrors of war experienced by kids from the former Yugoslavia: the case of twin boys (age four). When they heard either police or ambulance sirens, one child began vomiting out of fear while his brother became

very aggressive during the play-therapy program, as the boys believed that the sirens were air raid warnings".

(KI - Region of Waterloo - Health Promotion Officer)

"A group of adolescent boys in the 8th grade from the former Yugoslav Republic had succeeded in convincing their parents to let them attend their neighbourhood mainstream high school. Thanks to an ESL teacher, the parents learnt that their children could be bused to an ESL high school, where they could raise their other academic skills to match their verbal skills. The parents were also shocked to learn that they could approach guidance teachers to ask questions, get help and advice. The kids were furious at the ESL teacher for tipping off their parents. They had wanted to go to the school nearby so they could stay home later in the mornings and come home earlier in the afternoons, etc. All the kids now attend the ESL high school."

(KI - Waterloo Region District School Board)

Discussion and Recommendations

The purpose of this report is to present the findings of key informant interviews regarding the problems facing immigrant/newcomer parents; existing services for them, and the effectiveness of these services; gaps and shortcomings in them and recommendations for improving services. In total, 24 key informants were interviewed from six service domains: 1) health and mental health; 2) education (ESL teachers, Directors and Superintendents); 3) welfare; 4) legal; 5) family support; and 6) settlement workers. The key informants in three urban centres - Toronto (GTA), Ottawa-Carleton and Kitchener-Waterloo - spoke from specific sectors, different geographic spaces and their own experiences, but there was remarkable consensus on a number of issues as they related to immigrant parents. **It should be noted that distinctions were not discernible between the views of key informants in the three cities.** This may be the case because of limitations in the methodological approach that focused on a small subset of people. It is also likely that they face similar problems. One area of specific concern for 3 key informants in the Kitchener- Waterloo region regarded the needs and services available to refugees who face specific complex needs dealing with trauma and displacement. While one informant raised this issue in Toronto, Toronto's density of services and numerical strength of communities may provide more outlets to deal with refugee issues more than the other two cities. It appears the issue of refugee settlement needs further attention in general but might be more acute in Kitchener-Waterloo.

This consensus revolves around the limitations in the current services, agencies, organizations or programs available to immigrant parents. Clearly, a dominant theme had to do with the **linguistic and cultural limitations** of existing services whether one is referring to the boards of education through their schools, settlement services, health services, family services or the police/justice field. The lack of English language skills is a tremendous inhibitor to parents who need

services that may be available, need to understand the education system to help their child, or need to communicate with their Canadian-raised children. **Key informants were quite clear in what they perceived as the solution to this social reality. It was twofold. Make ESL classes more widely available and at flexible times for immigrant parents who are in job training, working several jobs or in shift work. And offer ESL with daycare so that women (or men) do not have to make the choice between caring for their children and developing their language skills. In addition, key informants stressed the need not only for translators but skilled social workers, teachers, police officers and service providers, etc. who can speak the languages of newcomers/immigrants.**

Of course, language was the most practical everyday barrier that key informants felt could be reduced as a factor, if not altogether resolved. The stereotyping, discrimination or, more innocently, cultural misunderstandings that immigrant parents encounter require systemic change and changes in attitudes and behaviour that are far more difficult to effect. It was hoped that with the addition of workers with different language skills, there might be a more inclusiveness and understanding of diversity in societal institutions. This, however, cannot resolve the cultural disjunctures that emerge between parents and children that were noted above. Improving the language skills of immigrant parents can help to reduce stress, increase the confidence of parents and reduce the need for role reversal situations with the children in the encounter with needs in Ontario. Nevertheless, culture and language are not synonymous and inevitably the everyday differences of lifestyle and cultural expectations in Ontario, as compared to the parents' country of origin and compounded by North American consumer culture, creates tensions between immigrant parents and their children and immigrant parents and host society institutions. Furthermore, language skills may help immigrant parents find work but they will not change the systemic barriers in Canada that do not let them work at positions for which they trained in their home countries. Government and industry must make those changes.

A second area of consensus among informants was the issue of the **scarcity of funding**. Related to the issue of scarcity is also the inflexibility of funding models. Limited funding restricts the ability of services, agencies or organizations to take a holistic approach to solving problems faced by immigrant parents, from daycare to settlement to family and job counseling. Limited funding inhibits organizations from making long range plans so that they may better assess, organize and deliver services or provide programs to immigrant parents. Limited funding creates added stress on the front line workers over job security that inevitably filters down to immigrant parents who need some spaces of stability in their incredibly mobile and changing lives. Limited funding reduces equity if organizations cannot offer flexible programs that match the real lives of working immigrant parents, male and female, or if it prohibits organizations from translating literature or having an interpreter available. Limited funding reduces the capacity for the coordination of activities by groups working in all six domain

areas to respond to the complex needs of immigrant parents. Limited funding inhibits these groups from finding the time and labour to effectively evaluate and modulate what they do.

Specific Recommendations:

- a) More sensitivity to everyday issues immigrants face.
- b) Adequate funding of settlement programs for newcomers, so that there is continuity from month to month, year to year. One-time grants are time consuming to administer, disruptive to the already overburdened front-line organizations and are too short-lived to adequately support the real needs of communities.
- d) More consultation with community leaders and centres that service new immigrants in a variety of ways.
- e) More collaboration and meaningful dialogue between parties involved in service delivery.
- d) Fewer restrictions on meeting criteria for specific funding requirements
- f) Less paperwork, because it puts excessive strains on the labour and time of service providers and educators.
- g) Hiring more ethnocommunity workers and "*letting them show you their stuff.*" Use them for more than translators. Allow them to have mainstream training and let them affect/mould/shape mainstream training.
- h) Greater dissemination of facts about parenting - a balanced perspective to counter the effects of mass media.
- i) Cessation of underestimating the number of refugees as opposed to economic immigrants. The act of involuntary migration exacerbates a host of problems including parenting.

Appendix A

The Organizations and agencies at which the Key Informants work

Toronto

The Healthy Childhood Development Project (Jarvis St. & Gerrard St.)

Jane & Finch Child and Family Centre

Jewish Family and Child Service

Parkdale's Next Door Child Care

Riverdale Immigrant Women's Centre

Toronto Police Service (Community Policing Support Unit)

University Settlement Recreation Centre

Women's Health Centre, St. Joseph's Health Centre

Woodgreen Community Centre

York Region Board of Education

Kitchener-Waterloo

Centre for Research and Education in Human Services

Waterloo Region Community Action Program for Children

Waterloo Region District School Board

Waterloo Region Health Promotion Office

Ottawa

Children's Aid Society of Ottawa-Carleton (Family Services and Child Protection)

Better Beginnings Better Futures

Jewish Family Services

Ottawa-Carleton Catholic School Board

Ottawa Chinese Community Service Centre

Somali Centre for Family Services

South East Ottawa Community Health Centre

Appendix B

Protocol for Key Informant Interviews

Name of organization/agency: _____

Key informant's position: _____

Interviewer:

- We would like to ask you some questions, from your perspective as a service provider, about the main parenting issues immigrants face and the supports that exist to help immigrant parents address these issues.
- Secondly, we would like to hear any suggestions you have that might improve the support system.
- These questions relate specifically to newcomers to Canada who have arrived within the past three years, and the difficulties they encounter.
- As you answer these questions, please keep in mind the different experiences immigrant parents and their children face because of gender, age and ethnicity. (This should provide us with a more textured and nuanced understanding of the conditions confronted by you and the parents you serve.)
- There are three age-cohorts of children that should be considered, if possible, as you answer all the questions: 0-5, 6-13, and 14-18.
- The interview will start with general questions. Then, based on your responses, we may ask follow-up questions.
- A summary will be made of the key themes and issues you raise in your responses.
- Your name and responses will be kept strictly confidential when we report the results.

If you agree to participate, please sign below.

Key Informant: _____ Date: _____

Interviewer: _____

Questions

Note: The style of the interview will be open-ended, with these questions offering a framework within which to develop or elaborate. The terms will alter slightly depending on whether the interviewee is an educator, policymaker, service provider or involved with ethno-specific agencies, etc.

1. What do you see as the major issues facing immigrant parents as they interact with the services your profession provides? Please answer with respect to three age cohorts of children: 0-5, 6-13 and 14-18.
2. Do these issues or problems differ, from your experience,
 - (a) depending on the age of the children?
 - (b) depending on the gender of the parent?
 - (c) depending on the ethnicity of the parent/children?
3. What services currently exist to meet these needs?
4. In your opinion, how effective are these services?
5. Does gender, age or ethnicity of the parents influence access or helpfulness of services?
6. Could you give us illustrations of services that do work well? Describe the features of those services that work well. For those services you think work well, could you give us a sense of why that is?
7. In your opinion, what are the key problems, aspects, characteristics or factors that create difficulty for immigrant parents? How are these difficulties, from your experience, different depending on the age cohort of the children (0-5, 6-13 and 14-18)? What key problems do immigrant parents face in raising their child(ren) in Canada? Do the difficulties encountered vary by the age cohort of their children?
8. Does your organization conduct evaluations of services to immigrant parents on parenting issues? Formal or informal? What sorts of indicators are employed in evaluating the effectiveness of services offered in the area?
9. The indicators and/or measurements—how do they take into account the key dimensions of age, gender and ethnicity of the parents and children? Do the evaluations that are conducted take into account the age cohort of children? The gender and ethnicity of the parents and children who are being served?

10. In your opinion, what are the significant gaps or barriers in services to immigrant parents?
11. In your opinion, what would need to change to help better serve immigrant parents? Policy? Systems? Organization/agency?
12. Finally, is there any other significant issue we have not discussed that relates to this theme? Is there a particular anecdote or experience you have had that you wish to share that reflects some of the concerns we have discussed?