IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON NEWCOMERS

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONCERNS AND EXPERIENCES OF IMMIGRANTS DURING COVID-19

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There seems little doubt that COVID-19 and the resulting public health measures put in place by governments have had a disproportionate impact on certain populations. Those more vulnerable to labour market changes – especially those with lower paying service sector jobs or living in low-income or crowded housing conditions – are more likely to be adversely affected by the crisis. Immigrants, especially newcomers, often face such situations. They are among those who are least capable of tolerating a large income loss and/or more likely to see prolonged levels of unemployment. There is concern that the conditions of the pandemic may adversely obstruct the path to integration in Canada.

What, however, do we really know about the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 on the immigrant population in Canada? Several new data sources have emerged since March that help illuminate their situation, concerns and experiences during the pandemic. There is also the monthly Labour Force Survey that tracks their labour market experiences. Pulling together these diverse sources, this article will examine the concerns of immigrants in Canada, and their labour market situation to date.

GREATER CONCERNS FOR CATCHING THE VIRUS

Statistics Canada conducted a web-panel, Canadian Perspective Survey: Impacts of COVID-19, March 29 – April 3, 2020. This rich dataset provides insights into the early concerns of immigrants in Canada.[1]

Compared with Canadian-born individuals, immigrants reported greater concerns about the health impacts of

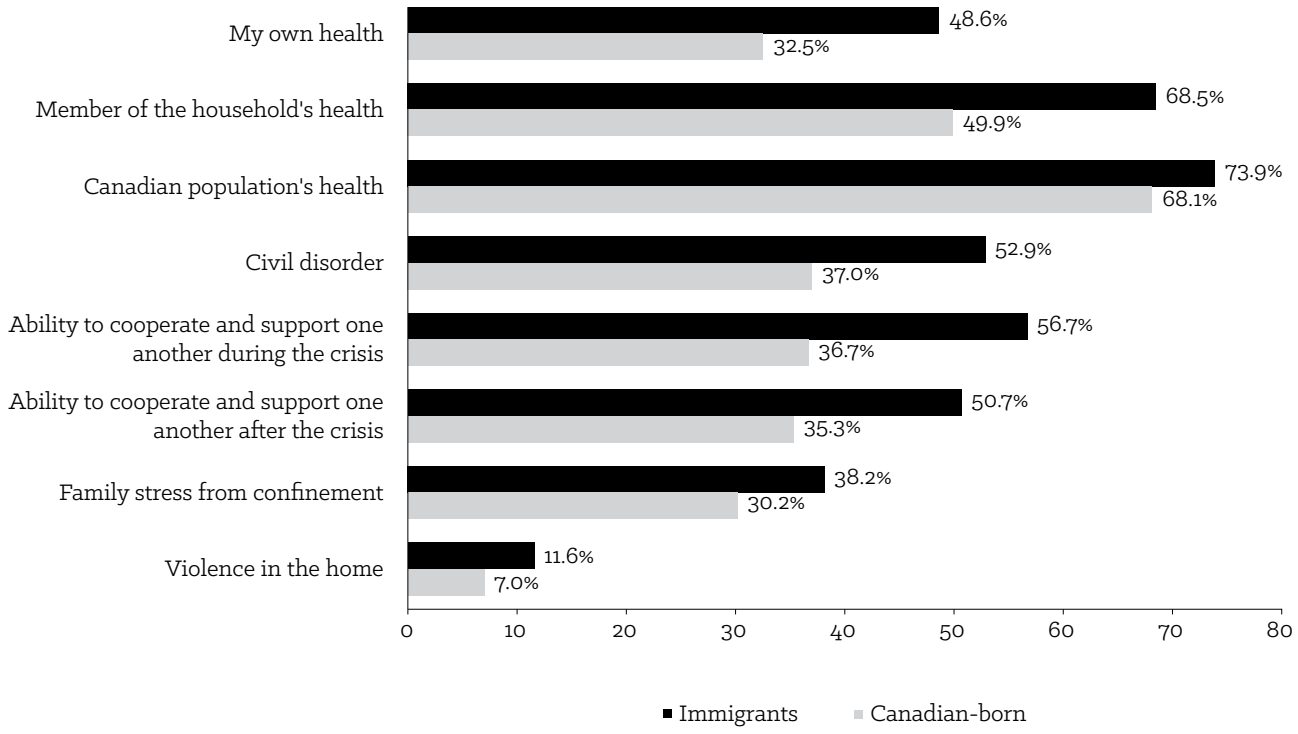
1 Statistics Canada, "Canadian Perspectives Survey Series: Impacts of COVID-19 on Immigrants", conducted between March 29-April 3, 2020, based on Labour Force Survey rotates-outs. More than 4,600 respondents in the 10 provinces participated in this web-based survey, including 357 immigrant men and 366 immigrant women. All differences in this analysis between immigrants and Canadian-born individuals are significant at the 5% level ($p<0.05$).

COVID-19 – whether their own health, that of household members, or Canadians in general. Nearly half of the immigrants surveyed (48.6%) were *very* or *extremely* concerned about the possible impacts of COVID-19 on their own health, compared with one-third of Canadian-born (32.5%). These worries increase when asked about the impacts of COVID-19 on the health of other household members: 68.5% of immigrants were very or extremely concerned, compared with 49.9% of the Canadian-born.

MAIN SOCIAL CONCERNS

Immigrants reported higher levels of concern (very or extremely), compared to the Canadian-born population, on a range of social impacts of the pandemic. For example, 52.9% of immigrants were concerned about social disorder, in contrast to 37% of Canadian-born. Over half of immigrants (56.7%) were very or extremely concerned about the ability to cooperate and support one another during the pandemic, compared with about one-third of Canadian-born (36.7%).

GRAPHIC 1: PERCENTAGE VERY OR EXTREMELY CONCERNED ABOUT SELECTED SOCIAL IMPACTS OF COVID-19



Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Perspectives Survey Series, March and April 2020.

Nearly 40% of immigrants also expressed worry about family stress during confinement, compared with 30% Canadian-born. Moreover, immigrants were about twice as likely as Canadian-born to be worried about the potential for violence in the home. These higher levels of concern among immigrants remained even when other factors were taken into account.[2]

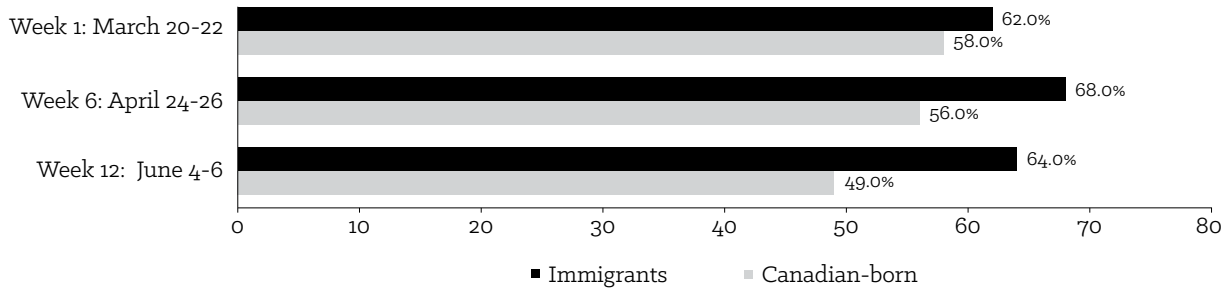
IMMIGRANT CONCERNS REMAIN HIGH

Immigrants continue to report higher rates of concern over COVID-19 since the onset of the pandemic. A weekly survey conducted by the Association for Canadian Studies, the Vanier Institute of the Family and Leger found that 64% of immigrants were personally afraid of contracting COVID-19 (as of

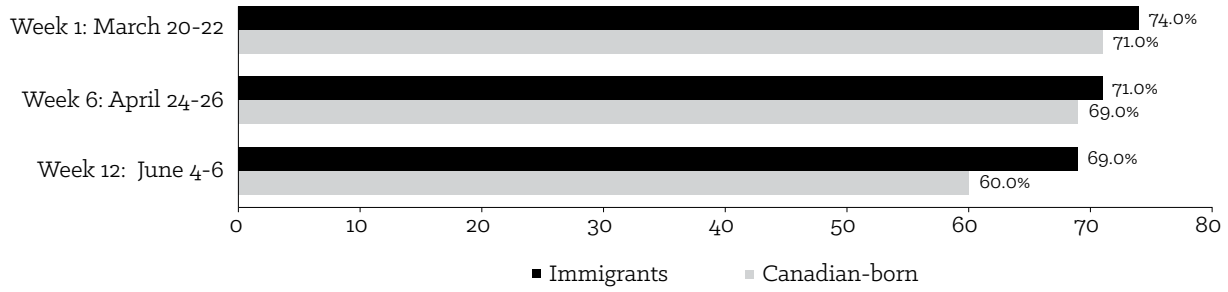
2 M. Turcotte and D. Hango, "Impact of economic consequences of COVID-19 on Canadians' social concerns", Statistics Canada, May 2020, catalogue no. 45280001.

June 4-6), compared with 49% of Canadian-born.[3] This worry was higher among immigrant women (63%). Concern for family members contracting the virus also remained higher: 69% of immigrants in contrast with 60% of Canadian-born. Again, immigrant women were more fearful, at 75%. Overall, fear of getting the virus has declined more for the Canadian-born than for immigrants.

GRAPHIC 2: PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE WHO ARE PERSONALLY AFRAID OF CONTRACTING COVID-19



GRAPHIC 3: PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE WHO ARE AFRAID OF FAMILY MEMBER CONTRACTING COVID-19



Source: Weekly surveys on COVID-19 Impacts, Association of Canadian Studies in collaboration with Leger, 2020.

It is clear, therefore, that there exists a fair level of anxiety among the immigrant population about the potential impacts of COVID-19 both at the onset and during the pandemic.

FINANCIAL IMPACTS

Historically, immigrants – especially recent arrivals and refugees – have been more vulnerable to economic downturns. The pandemic and economic downturn is proving to be no different, and may in fact have exacerbated the situation for immigrants, considering existing vulnerabilities:

Immigrants were more likely to report that there would be a major impact on their ability to meet financial obligations or essential needs (19.7%), and were less likely to say that it would have no impact (24.8%), than were the Canadian-born population (11.6% and 33.8% respectively).[4]

Recent analysis by the Vanier Institute of the Family demonstrates that the financial concerns of immigrants

3 This weekly survey conducted since March included 1,500 individuals aged 18 and older based on computer-assisted web-interviewing technology. All samples, with the exception of those from March 10-13 and April 24-26, also included booster samples of approximately 500 immigrants. Survey results were weighted using selected 2016 Census results. No margin of error can be associated with a non-probability sample (web panel in this case.) However, for comparative purposes, a probability sample of 1,512 respondents would have a margin of error of +/-2.52%, 19 times out of 20.

4 S. LaRochelle-Côté and S.Uppal, "The social and economic concerns of immigrants during the COVID-19 pandemic", Statistics Canada, May 1, 2020, Catalogue no. 4528001.

have not abated during the course of the pandemic. Over a six-week period, immigrants reported a consistently higher level of concern about meeting their financial obligations – including paying bills, rent or mortgage – than those born[5] in Canada.

LABOUR MARKET IMPACTS

The monthly Labour Force Survey (LFS) provides a rich source to chronicle and assess the labour market situation of recent immigrants both before and since the COVID-19 situation began. Recent results from the May LFS suggest that not only has there have been no rebounds in employment for recent immigrants, but signs are that the labour market is worsening for them during the crisis. It remains to be seen if their labour market situation rebounds as sectors of the economy start to gradually re-open. It is not yet known whether the adverse impacts of the pandemic will hurt the medium- to longer-term integration of recent arrivals, and whether certain immigrants such as refugees will be particularly affected.

EMPLOYMENT SHOWING NO REBOUND

Employment was little changed in May for recent immigrants (five years or less), with employment being 20% below the January level (not seasonally adjusted).[6] Immigrants of more than five years have fared better, with their employment down by 15.3% compared with January, more in line with the Canadian-born population (-9.6% from January to May).

INCREASING RATES OF UNEMPLOYMENT

Since January 2020, unemployment has been increasing for recent core-age immigrants (aged 25-54), suggesting a worsening labour market for newcomers during the pandemic.

In May, the unemployment rate was 15.3% for recent core-age immigrants, up from 10.1% in January 2020.[7] Rates for core-age Canadian-born workers also increased during these months, but not at the same degree of increase.

Immigrant women are experiencing an especially difficult time: a 20.4% unemployment rate in May (up from 12.7% in January). This was more than double the May rate for Canadian-born women (8.1%), and higher than for recent immigrant men (11.0%). While it is not new that recent immigrants have higher unemployment rates than the Canadian-born, the rate of declines in the labour force is particularly marked for recent immigrant women. Usually, higher levels of education mean better labour outcomes for immigrant women. But during the pandemic, recent immigrant women – no matter what their level of education – are experiencing higher rates of unemployment than recent immigrant men and Canadian-born women.

REGIONS OF ORIGIN

Recent core-aged immigrants experienced double-digit unemployment rates no matter their region of origin, the exception being recent immigrant men from Latin America. Recent immigrant women from Latin America and Africa had the highest rates of unemployment (22.3% and 22.2% respectively), but recent immigrant women from Europe (20.3%) and Asia (19.8%) also had higher rates than core-age Canadian-born women (8.1%).

MONTREAL HAS HIGHEST UNEMPLOYMENT FOR NEWCOMERS

The census metropolitan area of Montreal has had some of the highest rates of COVID-19 infections and deaths, compared to other regions of Canada. Recent core-age immigrants in Montreal are also experiencing disproportionate labour market impacts as a consequence of the pandemic. In May 2020, recent core-age immigrants in Montreal had an unemployment rate of 18.9%, up from 12.7% in January 2020 (+6.2%). This May rate was nearly double that of their Canadian-born counterparts (10.0%) in Montreal, and higher than the rate for recent immigrants living in Toronto (15.3%) and Vancouver (10.5%).

Unemployment rates increased generally for all recent immigrants since January 2020. This suggests that, regardless of region of origin or level of education, the economic and financial impacts of the pandemic have worsened the precarious

5 L. Martin, "Families New to Canada and Financial Well-being During Pandemic", Vanier Institute of the Family, May 21, 2020.

6 Statistics Canada, The Daily – Labour Force Survey (LFS), May 2020. The LFS estimates for May are for the week of May 10-16. The LFS estimates are based on a sample and therefore subject to sampling variability. As a result, monthly estimates will show more variability than trends over time. Data cited for immigrants are not adjusted for seasonality. For the unemployment data cited, they are also based on a three-month average.

7 The unemployment rate is the number of unemployed people as a percentage of the labour force (employed and unemployed).

situation of recent immigrants in Canada. The key question going forward is: how will newcomers fare during recovery, and what additional supports they may need to bolster full integration into the Canadian labour market and society.

TABLE 1: UNEMPLOYMENT RATES FOR RECENT IMMIGRANTS AND CANADIAN-BORN, AGED 25-54 YEARS, CANADA AND SELECTED CENSUS METROPOLITAN AREAS

	Recent Immigrants		Canadian-born	
	January 2020	May 2020	January 2020	May 2020
Canada	10.1%	15.3%	4.2%	9.1%
Montreal	12.7%	18.9%	3.8%	10.0%
Toronto	8.8%	15.3%	3.7%	8.1%
Vancouver	9.3%	10.5%	3.8%	6.7%

Note: Recent immigrants refer to landed immigrants 5 years or less in Canada.

Source: Statistics Canada, table 14-10-0082-01 Labour force characteristics by immigrant status, three-month moving average, unadjusted for seasonality.

AN INCOMPLETE PICTURE - CALL FOR DATA

The immigrant population in Canada represents 22% of the Canadian population, the proportion higher in areas such as Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver.[8] Currently, Canada welcomes around 300,000 immigrants annually. Looking to the future, immigration will be the main source of population growth in Canada.[9] The successful integration of immigrants into Canadian society and the economy – even during periods of economic downturn – is essential for Canada's success.

The COVID-19 crisis in Canada has revealed significant data gaps in regard to the its socio-economic impacts and the way it is affecting the health of vulnerable populations, including immigrants. Many are calling for the need for "race-based," disaggregated health and other data.

Data will also be needed to monitor the outcomes among recent immigrants as the pandemic continues and the economy starts to reopen. Will the COVID-19 situation ultimately damage immigrants' economic prospects in Canada? Detailed socio-economic and health data on immigrants, along with racially disaggregated data, will allow governments to tailor their potential solutions and provide outreach and supports for these populations. What is clear so far is that immigrants are being obliged to cope with the inequitable effects of the pandemic – so their concerns and worries remain high.

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8 Data from the 2016 Census of Population.

9 Immigration as the key component of population growth will be especially important if fertility declines as a consequence of the COVID-19 situation.