FAMILY MEMBERS AND RELATIVES

An Important Resource for Newcomers' Settlement?

ABSTRACT

Using data from the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada (LSIC), this article examines social networks and the role they play in the settlement and integration of immigrants to Canada. The authors look at difficulties faced by immigrants during their first six months of arrival and find that there are some differences depending on immigration category, country of origin, age and other factors. One key finding is that the presence of family members and relatives is important during a newcomer's immediate settlement period.

A personal social network refers to all of the individuals with whom a person is connected – including immediate and extended family members, friends, neighbours, co-workers and acquaintances.[2] It is important to examine social networks because of the role they play as sources of information and social support and as a caring shoulder during stressful times. For newcomers to Canada, just as for other Canadians, social support or helping networks help newcomers solve daily challenges. Through their networks, newcomers gain access to many kinds of assistance that are critical to their settlement and longer-term integration into Canadian society. Just knowing people in Canada does not help newcomers integrate into Canadian society; rather, it is the flow of support through network connections that can make the integration process smoother or faster.

Typically, examinations of immigrant integration focus on characteristics of the immigrants that relate to their "human capital" (e.g., level of education, previous work experience, and knowledge of Canadian official languages). In more recent years, studies have shown that the type and quality of immigrants' social networks can be just as important as "human capital" characteristics in helping to explain why some immigrants appear to integrate into Canadian society faster, or with fewer difficulties, than others.[3]

The first wave of interviews of the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada (LSIC) collected information on immigrants' social networks and the role that these networks played in assisting them with different settlement issues during their first six months in Canada. This article highlights how social networks support newcomers with a particular focus on this immediate settlement period. One key finding is that family members and relatives do play an important role as a source of assistance to newcomers.

JEAN BERGERON[1]
Jean Bergeron is a member of the Research and Evaluation Branch at Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

STEPHANIE POTTER
Stephanie Potter is the Principal of SP Consulting.

Network size and tie strength matter

To understand how personal social networks can affect newcomers' adaptation to Canadian society, it is important to be able to describe some key network characteristics.[4] One important characteristic is the strength of the connections between the newcomer and their network members. Strong ties generally occur among individuals who are similar to one-another. They connect people who may go to the same church, play the same kinds of sports, *etc*. When people form close groups, not only do they often share the same interests, but they also share much of the same information and tend to make the same recommendations. Often, people who are strongly connected are also close emotionally – such as friends and family members. For this reason, strong, more intimate ties tend to provide large amounts of social support, and are therefore important to have.[5]

By contrast, weaker contacts connect people who are more different: the more different the members of a person's network, the more likely it is that the individual will have access to a range of information he or she would not ordinarily get. For example, if most of the people in a newcomer's social network are fashion industry workers, chances are that this newcomer is going to get tips on job openings within this occupational area. If they want work in other occupations, it is unlikely that close network members will have very good job information related to those other occupations. Instead, this person needs to reach beyond the boundaries of this network through a "weak tie" to access specialized information. Weaker ties are said to provide access to scarce resources, such as information on job openings.[6] Depending on the type of help required, then, a strong or a weak tie may be needed.

Another key network characteristic is size: people with larger networks also tend to have access to greater amounts of social support, as well as to different types of support. This can be very important when newcomers arrive in Canada. The larger the number of people newcomers can draw upon for help, the more likely they are to receive the help they need, and the less likely they are to overload the people in their networks with demands for assistance.[7] Larger networks provide people with access to more individuals, and so potentially to more support, but most importantly, larger networks are also more likely to have a higher proportion of 'weak ties' that serve as bridges to scarce information, particularly in the context of occupational mobility. Networks with a predominance of strong kinship ties have also been found to be associated with high levels of all kinds of social support, but they also tend to be smaller.[8]

The characteristics of newcomers' networks and of the role they play are often linked to the characteristics and social roles of the newcomers. For example, seniors' social networks tend to be dominated by kin (as people age and friends move away or die), though if older neighbours exist, they tend to be network members. Younger people tend to associate with those of similar age, marital and parental status. Women usually have more kin-based network members, as they tend to be the "kin-keepers" in the family, organizing family events and staying in touch with distant relatives. These tasks are associated with working in the home, but they tend to persist even for women working outside of the home. Women with children tend to be connected to their neighbours with children, through their children's friendships, day cares and schools. By contrast, men tend to have more network ties to co-workers, and smaller networks overall, than women. In addition, social networks vary according to other characteristics of newcomers, such as their immigration category; country of birth; ethnic, religious or cultural identity; a nd various others.[9] For the purposes of this article, only a few are examined.

Differences are slight by gender, but substantial by immigration category. Immigrants landed in the family class appear to be the "best connected."

Most newcomers know people in Canada at arrival

The first wave of LSIC shows that most immigrants have some sort of a network in Canada at the time of arrival. The majority (87%) of newcomers interviewed for this study report that they had relatives, friends or both already living in Canada when they arrived. Slightly more than one in ten individuals could not report any such connections. Approximately two thirds had only friends or only relatives when they arrived.

Differences are slight by gender, but substantial by immigration category. Immigrants landed in the family class appear to be the "best connected." In contrast, many refugees[10] (25%) report that they knew neither relatives nor friends at arrival. However, similar to family class immigrants, refugees are also more likely to know only relatives, while economic immigrants report that their connections are in large part made of friends. While it is encouraging that so many newcomers had some kind of network in Canada at arrival, it is important to recognize that many refugee and economic immigrants do not have a social network at arrival – approximately two in ten. At current immigration levels, this could be as many as 20,000 new adult immigrants without a social network.

Examining these same results by top countries of birth indicates some interesting differences. Immigrants from four countries report a predominance of friendship only connections at landing: China (54%), South Korea (38%), Romania (51%) and Russia (42%). Korean (33%) and Russian (27%) newcomers also have the highest proportion who knew no one in Canada upon arrival. By contrast, a higher proportion of immigrants from India (49%), the Philippines (44%), and Pakistan (38%) report they knew only relatives in Canada at arrival. Among immigrants from these countries, all have fewer than average reporting knowing no one at time of arrival.

The presence of networks at landing by age also demonstrates an interesting relationship: a higher proportion of people in the youngest (15 to 24 years old) and oldest (55 and older) age groups report knowing relatives only at landing (50% to 64% according to the age group), while higher proportions of those aged 25 to 44 indicate they had only friends in Canada when they arrived (over 40%). Immigrants aged 45 to 54 had a more even distribution of those knowing family or friends (32% and 26% respectively). Immigrants in the oldest age group have the smallest proportion reporting that they knew no one at arrival. Somewhat higher proportions of immigrants in the other age groups report no network at arrival.

These results are in keeping with the immigration categories that dominate each age group or country of birth, as well as the history of immigration that each country has with Canada. It is not surprising that where some countries have been sending immigrants for longer periods of time, the most recent newcomers have a greater chance of knowing relatives and friends in Canada. Likewise, where the immigrants coming from a particular country are more likely to be admitted to Canada under the family category of immigration, it is also more likely that these immigrants will report knowing family rather than friends at arrival.

Besides knowing whether newcomers had connections in Canada at arrival, another important aspect of their social networks is the geographic proximity of the people that they know in Canada: the closer network members live to the newcomer, the more likely they are to provide assistance and support.[11] The LSIC collected information on the proximity of relatives and of newly-made friends in Canada. The vast majority (88%) of all newcomers say that their relatives live in the same city; somewhat fewer immigrants report new friends living in the same city or

Newcomers reporting friends or relatives living in Canada at arrival as a proportion of all newcomers interviewed six months after arrival

Settlement Areas:	Family Class	Skilled Workers: Principal Applicants	Skilled Workers: Spouses/ Dependants	Other Economic Immigrants	Refugees	All Newcomers
Relatives only	64 %	12 %	18 %	22 %	40 %	30 %
Friends only	2 %	52 %	44 %	37 %	15 %	33 %
Relatives and friends	30 %	22 %	20 %	22 %	20 %	24 %
No personal connections	4 %	13 %	18 %	19 %	25 %	13 %

Source: Statistics Canada. Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada, Wave 1 (2001-2002).

Newcomers who try to find services as a proportion of all newcomers interviewed six months after arrival

Settlement Areas:	Family Class	Skilled Workers: Principal Applicants	Skilled Workers: Spouses/ Dependants	Other Economic Immigrants	Refugees	All Newcomers
Health care	77 %	71 %	76 %	68 %	81 %	75 %
Housing	41 %	90 %	90 %	90 %	82 %	76 %
Education/Training	53 %	70 %	73 %	70 %	79 %	66 %
Employment	61 %	90 %	66 %	48 %	47 %	71 %

Source: Statistics Canada. Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada, Wave 1 (2001-2002).

nearby (82%). Only slight differences are observed by immigration category. For example, slightly more family class immigrants (95%) than economic immigrants (80%) report relatives living in the same city. This compares to almost nine in ten (88%) for refugees.

Newcomers report challenges and mobilize resources differently depending on their immigration category

A key contribution of the LSIC to current understanding of immigrant integration concerns how newcomers achieve key settlement-related goals, including obtaining health care, housing, education, and employment. One important question is whether there is a relationship between immigrants' characteristics and the challenges they face. Do immigrants problem-solve in different ways? Do they tend to obtain assistance from different sources, and how does this affect their integration? The LSIC asked from whom newcomers *obtained* assistance, rather than from whom they *requested* assistance and, as such, the analysis focuses on sources of actual rather than potential assistance. While this study does not document the full problem-solving pathway from the perspective of the newcomers themselves, it provides insight into some of their main challenges and the ways in which they worked to solve their settlement difficulties.

Shortly after arrival, more than two thirds of all newcomers engage in activities to find housing, health care services, education or employment. Immigrants admitted in different categories do behave differently. With the exception of finding health care services, family class immigrants are the least likely to engage directly in all these tasks, while a very large number of skilled worker principal applicants (90%) try, for instance, to find housing and employment. Less than half (47%) of all refugees try to find employment in their first six months in Canada – they are more likely to look for education and training services.

Of all key settlement-related goals, it is access to employment that causes the most problems. Seven in ten recent newcomers who entered the labour force report having experienced difficulties in finding employment. By contrast, the LSIC suggests that other activities (i.e. looking for health care, housing or training) are a challenge for less than 40% of the newcomers looking for services. The proportion of immigrants who experienced challenges also varies widely by immigration category. No matter what goal is pursued, the highest proportion of immigrants reporting difficulties is consistently found among skilled workers. Family class immigrants generally face challenges in proportions that are well below average.

Some of the variations by immigration class may be explained by social network differences: family class immigrants may report fewer problems because they have family in Canada from who they receive assistance even before a problem is experienced. This may also extend to the area of employment, where some obtain jobs in family-operated businesses. By contrast, we observe more similar outcomes in terms of proportion of newcomers in each immigration category experiencing problems with access to education and training. One possible explanation is that more systemic obstacles may be at work here which rule out the use of family-based connections.

For the most part, the problems experienced or perceived are goal-specific, and some also confront Canadians in general, not only newcomers. Lack of availability of health professionals, long waiting lists, insufficient number of training sessions, financial

Newcomers who report difficulties as a proportion of all newcomers who tried to find services

Settlement Areas:	Family Class	Skilled Workers: Principal Applicants	Skilled Workers: Spouses/ Dependants	Other Economic Immigrants	Refugees	All Newcomers
Health care	15 %	27 %	28 %	25 % [E]	20 % [E]	23 %
Housing	15 % [E]	43 %	44 %	27 %	38 %	38 %
Education/Training	35 %	42 %	42 %	39 %	31 %	40 %
Employment	56 %	76 %	75 %	53 %	67 %	70 %

Source: Statistics Canada. Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada, Wave 1 (2001-2002).
Note: [E] indicates that the quality of the estimate is not optimal. Therefore, the proportion must be interpreted with caution.

Newcomers assisted with settlement activities as a proportion of newcomers who report difficulties

Settlement Areas:	Family Class	Skilled Workers: Principal Applicants	Skilled Workers: Spouses/ Dependants	Other Economic Immigrants	Refugees	All Newcomers
Health care	142 %	23 %	26 %	23 % [E]	39 % [E]	28 %
Housing	31 % [E]	41 %	38 %	53 %	55 %	41 %
Education/Training	46 %	30 %	39 %	40 %	47 %	37 %
Employment	39 %	32 %	31 %	40 %	46 %	34 %

Source: Statistics Canada. Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada, Wave 1 (2001-2002).

barriers, poor official languages ability and non-recognition of foreign credentials or work experience are the key challenges reported by newcomers. Two of them – language and financial barriers – are reported in three of the four settlement areas examined by the LSIC. The only area where language does not appear as one of the most serious problems is in the area of housing, where systemic barriers related to housing availability dominate. Financial barriers relate to obtaining education or training, and accessing health care or housing.

Of immigrants who report having experienced difficulties with their settlement activities, not everyone received help. Among those experiencing problems in specific areas, approximately three in ten received help with access to health care or employment, and four in ten were assisted with finding housing or getting education or training. Interestingly, refugees and family class immigrants tend to have the lowest proportions reporting settlement-related problems, as noted before, but they also report above average rates of assistance.

If we concentrate briefly on the key sources of assistance identified by the newcomers, we note that family and friends are generally reported as the first or second most frequent source of help regardless of the settlement-related goal. We also observe that, across the four areas of settlement goals, family class immigrants rely a great deal on relatives and family members for their assistance (between 56% and 78% depending on the settlement goal), while skilled workers and other economic immigrants tend to rely more heavily on friends (between 41% and 65% depending on the settlement goal). As well, compared to other newcomers, a higher proportion of refugees report being helped by settlement organizations[12] regardless of the settlement goal.

This brief examination of the incidence of settlement challenges experienced by newcomers and their mobilization of resources reflect, as expected, overall differences in the type of social networks or resources that newcomers entering within the different immigration categories have at their disposal when they arrive.

Summary

Within the first six months of arrival, newcomers are faced with tremendous challenges as they begin the process of settling into their new homes and communities, and the even longer process of integrating into Canadian society. As they seek to accomplish specific goals related to this process of integration – finding a home, accessing the medical system, obtaining education and training, and finding employment – newcomers use the resources at their disposal, of which social networks are an essential part. These networks provide access to many different kinds of support that newcomers can use as they face challenges and barriers to their integration.

Based on the first wave of interviews of the LSIC, the majority of newcomers to Canada have a social network at arrival in the form of relatives and family, friends, or a combination thereof. Yet, given the value of social support to the integration process, it is important to note that more than one in ten adult immigrants know no one in Canada when they arrive, and that this situation is particularly true for many refugees (25%). Family class immigrants tend to rely on family and relatives for assistance, while skilled workers and other economic immigrants are more likely to rely on friends; refugees use both sources depending on the type of challenge. Regardless of the area of integration being examined, family and friends dominate as the top two sources of help used.

Overall, the variations observed require much more research to better understand their origins. Information from subsequent waves of interviews of the LSIC will help understand changes to newcomers' social networks, the types of challenges newcomers face, and the role of networks in resolving these challenges over the course of their integration in Canada.

Notes

[1] The opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of Citizenship and Immigration Canada or the Government of Canada.

[2] Wellman, Barry, Peter Carrington and Alan Hall, 1988. "Networks as Personal Communities." Pp. 130-184 in *Social Structures: A Network Approach*, edited by Barry Wellman and S.D. Berkowitz. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[3] Potter, Stephanie, 1999. *The Social Resources of Immigrants: Effects on the Integration of Independent and Family Class Immigrants to Toronto, Canada from South Asia*. Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Sociology, University of Toronto; Mostacci-Calzavara, Liviana, 1982. *Social Networks and Access to Job Opportunities*. Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Sociology, University of Toronto

[4] Potter, Stephanie, 1999. *The Social Resources of Immigrants: Effects on the Integration of Independent and Family Class Immigrants to Toronto, Canada from South Asia*. Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Sociology, University of Toronto; Wellman, Barry, Peter Carrington and Alan Hall, 1988. "Networks as Personal Communities." Pp. 130-184 in *Social Structures: A Network Approach*, edited by Barry Wellman and S.D. Berkowitz. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Mostacci-Calzavara, Liviana, 1982. *Social Networks and Access to Job Opportunities*. Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Sociology, University of Toronto.

[5] Wellman, Barry and N. Scot Wortley, 1990. "Different Strokes From Different Folks: Community Ties and Social Support", *American Journal of Sociology* 96(November): 558-588.

[6] Granovetter, Mark , 1973. "The Strength of Weak Ties." *American Journal of Sociology*, 78(May): 1360-1380; Granovetter, Mark, 1995. *Getting A Job: A Study of Contacts and Careers* (2nd edition). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

[7] Lin, Nan, 1982. *Social Structure and Network Analysis*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.

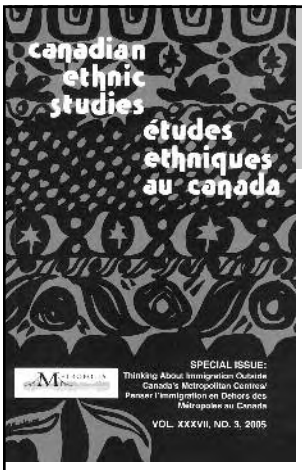
[8] Wellman, Barry and N. Scot Wortley, 1990. "Different Strokes From Different Folks: Community Ties and Social Support", *American Journal of Sociology* 96(November): 558-588.

[9] Fischer, Claude S., 1982. *To Dwell Among Friends: Personal Networks in Town and City*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Wellman, Barry and N. Scot Wortley, 1990. "Different Strokes From Different Folks: Community Ties and Social Support", *American Journal of Sociology* 96(November): 558-588.

[10] No individuals who claimed refugee status in Canada are included in the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada. Therefore the term *refugees* in this study refer to refugees landed from abroad.

[11] Wellman, Barry and Stephanie Potter, 1999. "The Elements of Personal Communities", in Barry Wellman (ed.) *Networks in the Global Village*, Boulder CO.: Westview Press.

[12] The term *settlement organizations* for the purpose of this article refers to a number of organizations that serve immigrants, and include ethnic or cultural associations; religious



Thinking About Immigration Outside Canada's Metropolitan Centres

Special issue of Canadian Ethnic Studies

A recent special issue of *Canadian Ethnic Studies* (Vol. XXXVII, No. 3, 2005) looks at the regionalization of immigration. It was guest edited by Michèle Vatz Laaroussi (Université de Sherbrooke), Margaret Walton-Roberts (Wilfrid Laurier University), John Biles (Metropolis Project) and Jean Viel (Social Development Canada). The issue includes articles on regional dispersal in British Columbia, immigrant settlement in local labour markets in Ontario, on the settlement of refugees in Quebec City and in smaller cities in British Columbia, on francophone Acadians, interculturalism and regionalization, and on the services available to new immigrants in Halifax. There is also a conference report from "Immigration and Out-migration: Atlantic Canada at a Crossroads."

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