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DOES LANGUAGE, EMPLOYMENT STATUS AND REGION OF ORIGIN INFLUENCE ACCESS TO SETTLEMENT SERVICES?

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Canada depends on the settlement service provider organizations (SPOs) to take care of the needs of the newcomers assisting them to integrate within the new society. The main focus of the article is not the immigrants who use the services but the remaining two-thirds of the population of immigrants who need but do not use the available settlement services. This paper tries to reflect on the available immigrants' service use in Western Canada and how the SPO can best assist those immigrants who need settlement services but cannot avail them.

Moving to a new country can be a stressful process that involves an immense learning curve as it presents many challenges and opportunities for newcomers. The purpose of settlement service provider organizations (SPOs) is to ease the challenges associated with settling and positively contribute to integration. Successful settlement should lead to integration and result in immigrants' active participation in all aspects of life. However, despite the availability of government and privately funded settlement resources, supports, and services to eligible immigrants and refugees in Canada, only about one-third of newcomers actually access services from formal organizations (Lo, et al., 2010; Wilkinson & Bucklaschuk, 2014). Such a finding troubles service providers and policymakers since it demonstrates that many newcomers do not access available resources and it is unknown how this large population is faring in society. This paper addresses the nature of immigrants' service use in Western Canada and intends to inform service providers,

academics, and policymakers of the characteristics of those who use services and those who do not.

Immigrants are not a homogenous group. Individual characteristics and the nature of the settlement service landscape in a community or province will influence the extent to which services will or will not be accessed. Furthermore, we cannot assume that all immigrants require or want assistance from a formal organization. Many individuals and their families have social networks already established in Canada that can provide information and resources. Others may find the information they need through their own means. Such immigrants will feel they do not need help to successfully settle and will not likely pursue resources through an SPO. But what about those newcomers who lack the social and human capital necessary to find assistance on their own and who struggle to navigate the settlement process? This article is primarily concerned with those immigrants who do not access services from an SPO, but feel they need such resources. It is this population that is cause for concern as they may struggle to settle and integrate because they cannot find the resources they require to navigate the labour market, find housing, or access innumerable other needs during the settlement process. This study fills a gap in the literature by examining the nature of settlement service use in Western Canada, which includes the provinces of British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and the Territories. While immigrants may deliberately choose not to access settlement services for a host of reasons, it is the population that needs assistance but cannot find their way to such resources that requires attention.

METHODS

The data used in this project are drawn from the Western Canada Settlement Survey. Survey respondents were contacted through information obtained from a Citizenship and Immigration Canada file of all newcomer landings between January 1, 2008, and December 31, 2012. All participants are 18 years of age or older and reside in one of the four western provinces or territories at the time of landing. The survey was conducted over the telephone between March and April 2013. The total sample includes 2,976 immigrants, who at the time of the survey were living in one of the four western provinces and territories for between three and 60 months. Surveys were available in multiple languages including English, French, Mandarin, Punjabi, or Spanish. The data has been weighted for immigration class and sex, based on information provided in the Longitudinal Immigration Database.

Survey respondents were asked if they have used any settlement service from an organization in their Province. If they answered in the negative, a series of questions were asked to identify their reasons for not accessing services. It is from this question that the analysis for this paper has been derived. The findings are separated into three groups: those who accessed services, those who indicated they didn't need services and those who needed but did not receive services.

FINDINGS

Our finding that only 36.5% of immigrants have accessed services through a settlement organization is consistent with other findings in the literature (Lo, et al., 2010). Therefore, nearly two-thirds of newcomers do not access services. It may be alarming to some that so many immigrants in Western Canada have not visited an SPO and numerous questions about this statistic arise. Who are the immigrants that do not access services? Why have they not accessed services? Where do they find information on settling in a new country? Until now we have been unable to delve into the characteristics of this group and while our data is limited, we can separate those who didn't need services (36.4%) from those who needed but did not receive services (27.1%)—two very different groups. It is this latter group, the ones who needed but did not receive services that we focus on.

There are various reasons for newcomers not to access settlement services and many simply feel they do not need assistance. In fact, 36.4% of survey respondents did not access services because they did not feel they needed help to settle. We are not suggesting that these immigrants have navigated their settlement process entirely without information or assistance. Rather, they do not feel the need to pursue assistance through a formal settlement service organization. There are many informal sources of information that immigrants can and do pursue on their own. For example, just over half of survey respondents received information on settling through government websites and 27.9% found information through another online source. Of course, knowledge of either official language enables immigrants to more easily seek such information on their own and it influences the extent to which they feel they need help to settle at all. Just over 90% of immigrants who accessed resources through online sources have high levels of English language levels. Also, immigrants with excellent English language fluency are the most likely to feel they do not need help to settle (49.9%). In general, immigrants seem to prefer more informal sources of settlement information as 58.2% of respondents went to family and friends for information. Therefore, it should be unsurprising that family class immigrants are the least likely to access services through a formal organization (see Table 1) and they are most likely to feel they do not need help to settle (44.4%).

TABLE 1: DIFFICULTIES ACCESSING SERVICE BY ENTRANCE CLASS

	Family		Economic
	Class	Refugee	Class
Accessed services	27%	Class	38%
Did not need services	44%	25%	35%
Needed services but did not receive them	29%	18%	28%

Source: WCSS, 2013
$X^2 = 105.231$, df=4, $P \leq 0.01$

Despite the many immigrants who feel they do not need services, there are 27.1% of respondents who did not access services, but did, in fact, need them. It is this group of immigrants that most concerns service providers and policymakers. From the data, we cannot discern the impact that this mismatch between needing services and not receiving them may have on immigrants, but we can speculate that they may struggle to meet their settlement needs. For any number of reasons, these individuals have not been able to find their way to the plethora of services available to them. It is evident that immigrants encounter a number of structural barriers to using services, which influences the extent to which they feel they can actually access services.

We cannot know exactly why survey respondents who feel they needed help did not access services since the data does not allow us to answer such questions. However, we can reveal some characteristics of those immigrants who fall within this category. There appears to be no significant differences between men and women in this group with both sexes being equally likely to access or not access. Immigration class does significantly influence service use with refugees most likely to access services (57%). The family class is the most likely not to access services (44.4%) and the most likely to need services, but not access them (29.1%). Among those with the very lowest levels of English language, 49.4% accessed settlement services while 30.4% needed services, but did not access them. Immigrants with very low English language levels are most likely to both access services and need services, but not access them.

Region of birth also has an influence on service use among immigrants with those who are born in Africa (44.8%) and Central and South America and the Caribbean (44.8%) most likely to access services. Interestingly, immigrants born in Asia (30.0%) and Africa (25.0%) are most likely to need services, but not access them.

The effect of employment status on settlement service use is also significant. Unemployed immigrants are most likely to both access services (46.8%) and need services, but not access them (28.6%). More specifically, unemployed male immigrants are most likely to both access services (49.3%) and require, but not access services (31%). The relationship between employment and service use could be related to the central importance of employment in the settlement process. When immigrants were asked what service they would need most if they were to use only one service in their province, 48.7% chose employment services such as getting information about jobs, assistance with foreign credential recognition, and assessment of skills and education.

The nature of the area immigrants settle in also has an influence on service use. Immigrants living in rural areas of Western Canada are the most likely not to access services (42.6%) and need services, but not access them (28.5%).

POLICY AND PRACTICE SUGGESTIONS

The group of immigrants who need services, but do not receive them require special policy and programming so that they are able to access the settlement services they need. For example, unemployed immigrants may need training and job preparation skills in conjunction with language training to navigate the labour market and find suitable employment. Those arriving through the family class may require information resources that lie outside of their kin relations to broaden their knowledge and use of support services. It is worth our while to examine these groups in more detail and determine their specific needs in order to help direct them to the services they require.

Unfortunately, without connections to formal SPOs, this group of immigrants can be difficult to identify, but there is a need to find creative ways to reach such individuals so they do not become further excluded and marginalized from formal support networks. This is an opportunity for governments and service providers to find new ways to engage all immigrants who require support. More thorough pre-arrival information services can be a place to start, but more is needed. Considering the extent to which immigrants use online sources, there is a need to develop comprehensive information sources on the internet that are available in multiple languages and provide resources from diverse sources such as federal, provincial, and local governments and community service providers. Such resources must be simple to navigate, yet provide thorough information for newcomers. Since one-quarter of all survey respondents cited a lack of information or awareness of services and nearly many cited confusion about where to go in order to get help (21.8%) as a barrier to getting assistance, there is a need to develop strategies that better engage and inform immigrants since a lack of information can lead to further challenges such as exclusion and marginalization (Caidi & Allard, 2005; Lo., et al., 2010; Simich, et al., 2005).

To our knowledge, no other study has systematically examined settlement service use according to the three main groupings noted in this article. More specifically, until now we have known nearly nothing about immigrants who do not access services, but still appear to need them. This article represents a starting point for future studies on those immigrants who are not finding their way to the many resources that exist for newcomers. There is much to learn about this group and both the nature of their need for services and the implications of not receiving services must be further explored. It is possible that immigrants who do not access services are successful in their integration process, but we would speculate that those who do not access services, but feel they do require them face many challenges as a result of structural barriers and a lack of awareness of support opportunities.

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NEIGHBOURLY ENVIRONMENTS OF THE CANADIAN AND FOREIGN-BORN[1]

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Using a pooled sample drawn from three Canadian General Social Surveys (GSS) of 2010, 2012 and 2013 consisting of 68,017 respondents, the present study examined differences in the reporting of neighbourly environments in the community of residence by Canadian-born and foreign-born individuals. Using an eight-fold exploratory typology, the study looked at how immigration related markers, socio-demographic and residential characteristics of survey respondents were associated with the reporting of neighbourly environments. The data revealed variations in the reporting of these environments by immigrant status and length of residence in Canada. Though positive type of environments were reported by both groups, net from other socio-demographic correlates, more negative environments and environments of lower contacts with neighbours were most frequently reported by the foreign-born, particularly recent immigrants residing in the larger metropolitan areas of the country. Immigrants of longer stay in the country still had limited contact with their neighbours. Targeted programs fostering neighbourly interactions could promote civic participation for groups living in less positive neighbourly environments in Canada.

For both immigrants and Canadian-born, neighbours are important agents of civic integration to the local community. Good neighbours may enhance the individuals' sense of safety, security and health while potentially improve the access to goods and services (Unger and Wandersman,1985; Brown et. al. 2009; Gray, 2009). Neighbours may also provide monitoring or "watching" functions over the household, become valuable information providers and even help individuals to exercise political skills, improve language skills and better the quality of their living environment.

The concept of a neighbourly environment refers to the social context or climate of prevailing attitudes and interactions established with neighbours in the community of residence (Martinez.et.al, 1991). Individuals who appraise their neighbours positively and frequently interact with them are likely to achieve higher levels of civic integration, social cohesion and social capital than those who do not (Bourdieu, 1986; Bridge, 2002; Van Oorshot, et.al, 2006). Bonding with other community residents is established on the principles of mutual trust, reciprocity and solidarity (Worley, 2005). Conversely, individuals who live in more perceived "hostile" neighbourly environments are likely to disengage with neighbors and abstain from participation in any complex interpersonal exchanges (Korte,1988; Lancee and Dronkers, 2011; Wong, 2003; Stolle et al, 2008).