

Introduction¹

In regard to families' collective settlement decision making, very little data exists. Most researchers would agree that few families migrate based on the expected outcomes for one individual alone. However, the literature is silent on how these collective migration strategies are negotiated and determined. In particular little is known about how the experiences of spouses and children contribute to the settlement and integration process once migrant families arrive and attempt to settle in Canada; coping mechanisms, family strategies, and the attainment of family well-being are seriously under researched. The information that does exist tends to be anecdotal.

The role of spouses and children in settlement decisions was identified as a key priority, set out by the Atlantic Population Table (APT), stemming from ongoing policy and program discussions at both the provincial and federal levels regarding the ability of less populated areas to attract and retain immigrants. Specifically, research was requested that focused on the extent to which spouses and children factor into the decision to settle or not to settle into a certain community. It was understood at the time that obtaining the type of information necessary to understand this issue required localized and qualitative research. In response, and in partnership with the APT, CIC (Research and Evaluation branch) commissioned a research project to Professor Madine VanderPlaat (Saint Mary's University) as the principal investigator and assisted by Assistant Professors Yoko Yoshida (Dalhousie University) and Associate Professor Howard Ramos (Dalhousie University).

The commissioned research comprises of two parts that this Research Brief will present: (1) a summary of relevant findings and important considerations from the commissioned literature review on the roles spouses and children play in settlement decision making in certain communities, and (2) an overview of the proposed qualitative methodological framework aimed at addressing the lack of data on this question of migrant family's settlement strategies.

Findings from the literature review

The decision of who migrates, where and when, is often a family decision made in the context of what is in the best interests of the family, especially the children.² Numerous scholars have argued that the family, rather than the individual, is the integral unit of analysis within the immigration experience.³ The family is a vital link between individuals and the larger structural setting and is recognized for the key role it plays in understanding decision making and outcomes related to migration, immigration and settlement.⁴ However, we know very little about how families work together to achieve economic, social and cultural goals.

The literature review centers on the role of the family in settlement decision making along three relevant themes: first, research conducted on the role of family in migration and settlement; second, research that explored the settlement outcomes for spouses and children; and third, research focused on family related settlement decision making in cities outside Montréal, Toronto, and Vancouver with a concentration on Atlantic Canada. The findings from the literature review are then used as a theoretical construct to inform a methodological framework and identify what research gaps a qualitative study would need to address.

Main findings from the literature review are as follows:

The role of family in migration and settlement

Very little data exists as to how families work together to decide where, when and why they settle. While extolling the need and importance of this area of inquiry, the research tends to examine settlement from the level of the individual and move directly to that of the community, despite the family being recognized as an important mediating factor. Of significance is that the literature does not discern between the needs of different family members and the well-being of the family as a whole. Mention of the family tends to be anecdotal or on the margins of the study.

¹ This Research Brief is a summary of the commissioned research undertaken by Professor Madine VanderPlaat (Saint Mary's University) as the principal investigator and Assistant Professor Yoko Yoshida (Dalhousie University) and Associate Professor Howard Ramos (Dalhousie University). The research report involved two parts: Part 1: Literature Review and Analysis of the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada (LSIC) and Part 2: Methodological Framework to Undertake Qualitative Analysis.

² See Bailey and Boyle, 2004; Lewis-Watts, 2006.

³ See Anisef and Kilbride, 2003; Chekki and Redekop, 2001; Creese, Dyck, and McLaren, 2006; McLaren and Dyck, 2004; VanderPlaat, 2006.

⁴ See Anisef and Kilbride, 2003; Chekki and Redekop, 2001, Creese, Dyck and McLaren, 2006; Hynie, 1996; McLaren and Dyck, 2004; Tyyskä, 2007; VanderPlaat, 2006.



Houle and Schellenberg (2010) in their analysis of the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada (LSIC), they find that most immigrants (including those in the economic admission class) moved to Canada for non-economic reasons such as joining other family members and providing a brighter future for their children. Interestingly, they find that immigrants' assessment of life in Canada is not significantly associated with marital status and presence of children. The authors indicate that this may be more a reflection of the limitations of the LSIC in addressing family level issues rather than the actual role of family in decision making. This points to the need for a methodological approach that truly assesses and analyzes family settlement decision making, which is presented later in this brief.

Internationally based research is also thin on this subject, but does provide a key consideration – that of the spouse, who are in most cases women. It is found that women have an active role in positively shaping the family's perception of the immigration [and settlement] experience through their “commitment to ensuring that their children are successfully integrated.”⁵

Children also impact the family's settlement experience. The literature continually references the idea that among those who have immigrated, providing a better future for children is a primary motivator for migration. Wulff and Dharmalingam (2008) find that the presence of children increased the likelihood of strong social connectedness by 72%. Also, parents are more likely than non-parents to become involved in neighbourhood activities. The 2008 European Commission report concludes that children appear to be the predestined negotiators between the older migrant population and the host society. The report also highlighted, “[T]he future of children as a powerful agent that may lead parents to knowingly accept to sacrifice their professional status” and that “sometimes the presence of their children can represent a source of energy that pushes them forward despite their personal losses.”⁶

It is clear in the literature that assumptions are made on the gendered nature of the roles of family members in migration and settlement. The use of the term “spouse” in the research is often assumed as referring to women and that these women are often dependents (both considered as such in the migration application process and more generally as not being the principal wage earner).

Settlement outcomes for spouses and children

The research conducted in the area of family related settlement outcomes indicates the importance to distinguish between the various stages of immigration, particularly between the stages of settlement and integration. The authors note that settlement outcomes are seen to relate to finding a place to live, getting a job, learning the language and accessing services while integration sees newcomers becoming full and equal partners in various dimensions of society. As Wulff and Dharmalingam (2008) contend, integration, or what could be seen as successful settlement, includes economic viability, social networks and the ability to make full use of opportunities available in the receiving society. Henderson (2004) suggests an “adaptation” stage between settlement and integration. The lack of consistency in how the term “integration” is used poses challenges to policy development because it affects the comparability of what is measured and gives little insight as to which policies and programs might best be targeted for review and further analysis.

Current literature on settlement and integration outcomes of family members is limited but also not helpful. The authors argue that the research tends to look at integration outcomes in isolation of each other when, for a family based assessment of settlement, one must consider the interplay of various potential outcomes and experiences of numerous members of the family unit. A gender based analysis is also needed as men and women may experience immigration and settlement/integration differently. The literature indicates that understandings of integration outcomes may not adequately capture women's pivotal role in care giving and kinship work and its impact on settlement decision making.⁷ Likewise, the European Commission (2008) report suggests that women are better able to cope with barriers to successful integration (such as professional mobility) because their multiple roles within the family allow them to find alternative sources of fulfillment. The literature in this area of inquiry also suggests the need to consider social connectedness in family based settlement outcomes.

The authors maintain that, while there is no literature available on integration outcomes unique to spouses and how these might impact on immigrant settlement decisions, there is limited research available on integration outcomes for children and how their outcomes may affect immigrant family decision making. As explained earlier,

⁵ See European Commission, 2008

⁶ See European Commission, 2008

⁷ See Dobrowolsky and Tastsoglou, 2008; VanderPlaat, 2007

families often choose to migrate to provide their children with a better future. Accordingly, numerous studies have pointed to the importance of educational opportunities as an important factor in settlement⁸. A safe environment is also important when considering children and integration outcomes⁹, as well as children having many friends and a sense of belonging.¹⁰

Settlement decision making in cities outside Montréal, Toronto, and Vancouver (MTV)

The reviewed literature on migration to and from non-MTV Canadian cities tends to focus on why immigrants leave, not why they stay. An unspoken and unchallenged assumption, according to the authors, is that the push/pull factors are the same and exert the same pressure whether one leaves or stays (i.e. those who leave do so for the opposite reasons than those who chose to stay).

Of relevance to this project from a research and policy perspective is the need to recognize the unique context within which the attraction of a particular community is assessed and built upon. Two interesting findings stemming from the literature review challenge some of the taken for granted assumptions as to why migrants leave or stay in smaller cities:

The first relates to employment opportunities, the existence of which is considered critical to the attraction and retention of immigrants. In his 2006 study of immigrants to South Australia, Hugo (2008) finds that suitable employment is a necessary condition for attracting immigrants but it alone is not a sufficient condition -- lifestyle, education for children, and community safety are considered to be more important. Thus, while the availability of employment is a basic requirement, non-work related elements are crucial. Hyndman et al. (2006) also points to the importance of quality of life versus quality of livelihood. Likewise Wulff and Dharmalingam (2008) indicate that local ties may outweigh economic benefits available elsewhere.

The second explains that family and friends appear to be important in terms of selection but not necessarily in terms of settlement.¹¹ However, Derwing and Krahn (2008) and Hou (2005) find that reasons given for staying in a community related to quality of life, economic factors and educational resources but not the existence of family and friends.

8 See Este, 2009; Flint, 2007; Kunz, 2005

9 See Burke, 2008; Kunz, 2005; Flint, 2007

10 See Quaiocoe, 2008 and Flint, 2007

11 See Derwing et al. 2005; Hou, 2005; Nauck and Settles, 2001

In terms of implications for policy both at the federal and provincial/regional level, the reviewed literature on settlement indicates the need to focus on why immigrants chose to *stay* in a given community and that settlement outcomes should be measured and understood within a specific community context.

The review of the literature suggests three broad areas that need further examination and incorporation in a methodological framework aimed at understanding the role of spouses and children in the settlement process, these include:

- The development of a family based model that recognizes and illuminates the multiple dimensions and interconnectedness of decisions related to migration and settlement;
- The exploration of gender and age specific settlement outcomes that reflect male and female roles within the family;
- The development of a measure to ascertain how the settlement experiences of various family members are weighted in the decision making process.

Methodological framework for future research to fill knowledge gaps

Through the review of the quantitative and qualitative literature, the authors offer a clear recommendation: more research is needed to understand how the family works together in regard to settlement decision making. Moreover, the authors' own analysis of the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada (LSIC)¹² lends strength to the hypothesis that family members influence settlement outcomes and decision making, as they were able to determine the following:

- There are differences between those immigrants who settle in Montréal, Toronto and Vancouver (MTV), and non-MTV areas, both in terms of demographic characteristics and settlement outcomes.

12 The authors conclude that, in this particular area of research, the challenges posed by the LSIC are numerous and included: sample attrition, small sample size of Longitudinal Respondents living in non-MTV regions, inconsistency of measures across the three waves of the survey, and the inability to link families to primary respondents. Also, sample size restrictions do not allow for analysis at the level of geography requested by the Atlantic Population Table, nor is there the option to consider decision making around staying in or leaving a certain community. Due to these and other challenges, the degree of significance drawn from the data for analytical purposes could be misleading.

- Having a spouse and/or children impacts immigrant settlement outcomes for the primary survey respondent.
- There are gender differences in the economic, human capital, social, cultural and value outcomes of immigrants analyzed in the LSIC.
- Having a family influences patterns of moving and staying. In particular, those living in non-MTV areas are more likely to move if they do not have children.

Given both the literature review and analysis of LSIC data do not provide information on how or why families affect settlement patterns, an in-depth qualitative approach is validated and strongly recommended.

The authors propose a qualitative methodology that would allow for the collection of experiential data as a basis to enhance understandings of migration and settlement *as a family project*. The methodology includes guidance or a “toolkit” for communities wishing to undertake the research with respect to: sample design and selection, data collection, validation, analysis, interpretation and dissemination.

The proposed methodological framework includes three options for data collection – semi-structured face-to-face interviews, self-administered questionnaires, and focus groups. The authors suggest a multi-pronged approach to data collection, analysis, validation and interpretation – interviews with families and analysis of interview results, followed by focus groups with respondents to validate the results of the interviews, and a suggested program/policy maker forum to explore the policy relevance of the data.

The analytical framework proposed for analyzing the qualitative data generated by the interviews and the self-administered questionnaire is organized around the concepts of needs (why family migrated, reasons for migration, perceptions on leaving versus staying), expectations (needs as related to settlement choices, reasons for selecting a community, perceptions on leaving versus staying) and experiences (extent to which needs have been met and expectations realized, each family members’ rea-

son for staying, results of decision to settle). By grouping the findings around these three conceptual areas, the suggested framework allows for the emergence of patterns and trends.

The methodological framework, in its organization and structure, intends to collect information from immigrant families involving the following areas of inquiry:

- Background information including place of birth (and country of last permanent residence), immigration category, year of immigration, year of settlement in a particular community and immigration/settlement history.
- Descriptions of the family members in terms of gender, age, education, pre- and post-migration occupation, employment status, etc.
- Reasons for immigration to Canada and the importance of these for each family member.
- Reasons for selecting and staying in a particular community and the importance of these reasons for each family member.
- The extent to which the decision to settle in a particular community has been a positive or negative experience for each family member.
- Perceptions of leaving versus staying in a particular community to address issues related to the attraction and retention of immigrants to less densely populated centers in Canada.

The proposed methodology, it is argued by the authors, is designed in a specific way so that the results are policy relevant. With this goal in mind, it is essential that the data is comparable at both the family and community level. The suggested “toolkit” not only provides data collection procedures and analytical frameworks to use with consistent application in mind, but it also enables researchers in various locales to carry out the research, in a collaborative and organized way. This proposed approach allows for a shared analysis of patterns and trends surrounding the extent to which spouses and children factor into the decision to settle or not to settle in a certain community.

Summary and conclusions¹³

This research brief highlights relevant information gaps identified in the literature review conducted by VanderPlaat et al, and posits the need for a family based approach to thinking about immigration and integration, one that recognizes and explains the multiple dimensions and dynamics found within the family's role in migration and settlement decision making. The limited research findings on the role of spouses and children in settlement decision making demonstrates that whether an immigrant chooses to settle in a certain community or not ultimately depends on the relationship between the immigrant and their family, and to their community. It is clear that the findings of their research are relevant to the issue of the integrative capacity of communities, the attributes that help communities to attract and retain immigrants. As such, a better understanding of the factors that contribute to immigrant attraction and retention, the role of spouses and children in settlement decisions has been identified as a key policy area worthy of further research and analysis. The proposed qualitative methodological framework provides a good first step in the development of research that will assist in better understanding the extent to which spouses and children (i.e. the family) are involved and impactful in decisions to settle or not to settle into a certain community.

Almost all statistics that deal with immigrants are based on the characteristics of individuals, and thus the topic of the role of the family has been widely understood as requiring qualitative research to gather information at the level of diversity needed, particularly in less populated communities. Ultimately, qualitative research is best carried out by the local community interested in the results. Having commissioned the research, CIC has provided a starting point around which researchers and communities could come together and collaborate to undertake research in an area they have identified as being greatly needed.

Based on the results from the commissioned literature review and the proposed areas of inquiry in the suggested methodological framework, it is recommended that future settlement related surveys – whether they be regional or national in scope – should undertake a practice of asking questions on family related decision making regarding migration, settlement and integration.

¹³ Please note, since the completion of the CIC commissioned study on “The role of spouses and children in the decision to settle or not to settle into a certain community: A focus on cities outside of Montréal, Toronto, and Vancouver”, CIC-Research and Evaluation branch has presented the recently redesigned Longitudinal Immigration Database (IMDB). The redesigned IMDB now allows for:

- Family identification (dynamic family identification indicator):
- Family income and credit measures
- Family composition indicator (immigrant exclusive/mixed)
- Number of children and their age

Such indicators provides options for research with the family as the unit of analysis, and allows one “to look at the effects of migration on family outcomes over time, to take into account patterns and change to immigrant family structure, and to examine the effects of family contexts on economic outcomes” (Crossman, 2012).

Examples of new/enhanced research possibilities:

- What does immigrant family structure look like at time of landing and what happens to immigrant family formation with years spent in Canada?
- Who is marrying whom? Are immigrant high-earners marrying high-earning immigrants?
- How does earnings stability compare among immigrant unattached individuals, lone-parents, couples and two-parent families?

The redesigned IMDB also provides the opportunity to examine low-income and social assistance, as family concepts, and provides a better welfare perspective on immigrant families' economic resource position (Crossman, 2012) Please see: <http://cicintranet.ci.gc.ca/connexion/govern-gouverner/research-recherche/pdf/2012/2012-10-05-eng.pdf> for family related and more information about the redesigned IMDB.

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