

Immigration in Canada Experiences of Immigrant Women

Stereotypes

There are many unfair stereotypes facing today's immigrants to Canada; however, there are also some that specifically target and disadvantage immigrant women.

Myth: *Immigrant women are in Canada to do the 'dirty work' that Canadian-born women don't want to do.*

Reality: Immigrant women are often driven to take jobs in manual labour even if they are trained and educated to do other work.¹ When they are unable to attain work within their field, they still need to find a job to support their families.

Myth: *Immigrant and refugee women are all women of colour, or don't speak English or French.*

Reality: Immigrant and refugee women come from all over the world! Additionally, some of these women from Africa, the Caribbean, Europe, and the United States speak English or French as a first language.¹

Myth: *Immigrant and refugee women get into Canada by manipulating the system.*

Reality: The system is actually designed to disadvantage these individuals. Thousands of them are rejected from entering Canada every year. Often times, media representation of their stories are incomplete or inaccurate.¹

¹ http://www.criaw-icref.ca/ImmigrantandRefugeeWomen#_ednref80



Myth: *Immigrant women take jobs away from Canadian-born women.*

Reality: Many occupations in Canada are experiencing labour shortages right now. If we did not benefit from immigrant and refugee workers, our population and economy would plummet.¹

Differences in Cultural Gender Norms

Depending on where a woman is emigrating from, their gender can result in very different experiences for people. Some people experience this difference in a positive way: more freedom, equality, and a safer environment than where they were in their home countries. While others face serious challenges due to extreme cultural differences and resultant anxiety.^{2,3,4}

Unique Challenges

Immigrant women experience some unique challenges when living and working within Canada.

² <http://canadianimmigrant.ca/settling-in-canada/is-womens-rights-a-reality-in-canada>

³ <http://homes.chass.utoronto.ca/~agreve/Salaff-Greve-Professions-family-STCS.pdf>

⁴ <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11f0019m/11f0019m2013349-eng.pdf>

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This may include experiences of violence, especially for those living in particularly vulnerable relationships such as domestic live-in caregivers, mail-order brides, or sponsored immigrant and refugee women. As they are reliant on their partner and/or employer for immigration status and economic support, these women are at risk of abuse, threats to withdraw work contracts, and/or obstructed access to legal and support services.⁵ Housing can also create unique challenges for immigrant women as homeowners often discriminate against them based on their gender, the presence of children or elderly parents, and their income status.⁶ Another challenge comes from having dependent applicant status (they have come to Canada as the dependent/spouse of another person who has entered as a skilled worker). This difference in classification often results in a drastic change of a women's occupational status as it is more difficult for them to find work.^{7,8} Health risks pose another barrier as emotional and mental health challenges are the greatest of all risks to immigrant women. This can result from exposure to violence, the burden of multiple family roles, social isolation, cultural and systemic barriers to care, poverty, underemployment, and extreme culture shock.^{9, 10, 11, 12}

⁵ McDonald, S. (n.d.). Not in the numbers: Domestic violence and immigrant women. *Canadian Woman Studies*, 19(2), pp.163-164.

⁶ Novac, S. (1999). Immigrant enclaves and residential segregation: Voices of racialized refugee and immigrant women. *Canadian Woman Studies*, 19(2), pp.88-91.

⁷ Statistic Canada: Minister of Industry. (2000). *Women in Canada 2000: A gender-based statistical report*. pp. 198.

⁸ <http://www.ceris.metropolis.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/BANERJEE-PHAN-Do-tied-movers-FINAL.pdf>

⁹ www.pwhce.ca/ptsd-immigrant.htm

¹⁰ Morris, M. (2001). Gender-sensitive home and community care and caregiving research: A synthesis paper. *Health Canada Women's Health Bureau*. pp. 27-30.

¹¹ Health Canada. (1999). *Immigrant Women and Substance Use*. pp. 11.



Providing Support

There are a number of ways that we can better support immigrant women within our community.¹³

- We can do this by being respectful and understanding of immigrant women and their unique experiences,
- Struggling against racist stereotypes in the people and places around us,
- Connecting with local immigrant women and groups to learn about their experiences and what we can do, and
- Through KIS, we can learn about available services and interpreters who can support and/or advocate on behalf of these women.

For more information, please contact:

Kamloops Immigrant Services

448 Tranquille Rd. Kamloops, BC

Ph: 778-470-6101

Email: kis@immigrantservices.ca

¹² Tastsoglou, E., & Jaya, S. P. (2011). *Immigrant women in Atlantic Canada: Challenges, negotiations, and re-constructions*. Toronto, Ontario: Canadian Scholars' Press Inc. Women's Press.

¹³ http://www.criaw-icref.ca/ImmigrantandRefugeeWomen#_ednref80