Senior Immigrants to Canada and Their Sponsoring Families: *The voices of senior immigrant men*

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Dissatisfaction with the migtration decision

- Some stated that they were happy, not because they were in Canada, but because they were with their children or grandchildren.
- Some (especially refugees) stated the reason for their happiness is that they have escaped a war and political instability but are unhappy with their loss of status in the community.

Lack of employment underlies most unhappiness and dissatisfaction:

"If you come here as a refugee it's impossible for you to be happy. I found myself here lost and unknown…. I came here, and I can't even say I started at zero, because I'm below zero. I'm willing to do anything, I'm willing to start at the bottom but they don't give you the opportunity to start anywhere." (*Arabic Speaker in Windsor*)

"I would have liked to have known what I was giving up by coming here. It's true, coming here probably saved my life, but at what cost? I've been unable to provide for my family because I don't speak English; we had a good socioeconomic position there; here we are at the bottom." *(Spanish Speaker from London)*

Misinformation compounds their difficulties

Some were dissatisfied because of the little information they received and felt “othered” and inferior through lack of information provided

Most information received through social networks was often incorrect or incomplete

Misinformation compounds their difficulties

Written information was often inaccurate and online information is also sometimes inaccurate

The most predominant deficit in knowledge related to gaining entry into their profession in Canada, especially regarding age discrimination and a need for Canadian experience

Misinformation

Seniors need correct information about:

- Access to employment
- The health system, the cost of medicine, and the 3-month waiting period for OHIP
- Canadian attitudes towards age and ageing
- Finances (including credit cards)
- Lifestyle, socialization, recreation activities, leisure activities
- Transportation
- Canadian law
- Social and community service information
- Workplace safety

Information Needed

Access to skills needed here, especially:

- Computer skills
- Skills in identifying and locating appropriate English classes, etc.
- Skills in meeting personal needs
- Skills in finding first-language health practitioners

Case workers are necessary to provide basic information about:

- ü Accommodation
- ü Leads to jobs
- ü Health care
- ü Education
- ü Transportation
- ü First-language media
- ü Differences between Canadian culture and their own
- ü Utilities contracts and their pitfalls

Most importantly: Good English classes

Good case workers are needed to:

- Answer their questions about Canadian laws, how to accommodate them, and unexpected pitfalls
- Help them apply for a SIN, health card, library card, and driver's license
- Refer them to doctors who speak their language, accompany them to appointments until they can speak English, etc.

Good case workers are needed to:

- Introduce them to the services such as:

ü community centres ü public libraries

ü seniors' programs ü winter activities

ü types of banks and how to choose among them ü legal aid ü food banks

ü social assistance ü seniors' housing

- Prevent the sense of isolation, loneliness, and depression

- Provide the seniors with the means to make connections on their own.

LEARNING ENGLISH

- 71 out of 72 men said learning English is important
- For most, **conversational groups** were preferred to structured classes.
- **Domestic responsibilities** -- looking after grandchildren and doing housework -- is a barrier for some men to taking English classes.
- **No mixed classes**: teachers tend to teach to the highest level and forget the seniors in beginner levels.

LEARNING ENGLISH

- Ideally, classes would be taught by a bi-lingual teacher, who speaks their language too, is patient and understands the seniors' learning phase and speaks slowly *(From a Spanish speaker in St. Catharines)*

- Half of the respondents mentioned transportation as one of the biggest obstacles to learning English.
    - They cannot afford to pay $4-5 a day, so they want classes within walking distance.

LEARNING ENGLISH

Transportation cost is one of the major barriers, so if you can give us the bus fare, we are ready to learn!

Gujarati speaker in North York

TRADITIONAL LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

- A little over half (38) said seniors live with their families, some with sons, others with daughters

"In my country they always live with their sons and if they don't have a son, then they live on their own for as long as they can and then when they are too old to live alone, then they live with their daughters. In my culture parents do not want to live with their daughters after the daughters are married, but if they don't have a son, then they decide to live with their daughters as the last resort. They try to live on their own for as long as they can."

-- Punjabi speaker in Toronto

Traditional Living Arrangements

Reasons given for extended family living:

- To care for grandchildren
- To receive care and support from their adult children
- For traditional and cultural reasons
- To support adult children until they can afford their own home
- Because they themselves need financial support
- Because, as one Arabic respondent stressed, **"We enjoy it."**

Benefits of retaining these arrangements in Canada:

- Maintaining their culture
- Enhancing the likelihood of good care in old age

  But: a seniors' home can be better than living with adult children who are too pressed for time to care for them.

Difficulties with these arrangements in Canada:

- Arguments over how best to raise grandchildren
- Lack of space
- Money issues
- Having to do too much housework
- Being poorly treated by their adult children
- Being dependent on their children

SEPARATE LIVING ARRANGEMENTS IN CANADA:

Exactly half of the interviewees said this is important:

Since houses here are made for nuclear families, it is difficult to accommodate multi-generational families. Even though hers was a three-bedroom house we felt that the house was not large enough for 6 persons.

-- Urdu speaker in Ottawa

Seniors said: Separate accommodations should exist…

- When the seniors and/or their adult children prefer it
- When the seniors have the financial means and good health to live on their own
- When there are interpersonal conflicts in the family home
- If the seniors are disrespected, exploited, or abused by their children

Seniors said: Separate accommodations should exist…

- When the seniors are not required to care for their grandchildren --OR
- If the seniors can still arrange to care for grandchildren, while living separately from them,
- If the senior can still get the support that they need (e.g., from community agencies)
- Near the homes of their children and grandchildren,
- If they have no one else with whom they can live, or
- If space in the adult child's home is limited.

Of course, having their own accommodation is the most important thing for immigrant seniors. Because a daughter's home is their (child's) home, it's not the senior's. They can't do and speak as they like. They can't invite friends to visit them. The lifestyle is different too. We get up very early every morning and go to bed early too. They go to bed very late and get up late too. They make a big mess every day, and they don't have time to tidy up. We don't criticize them. If we can, we try our best to tidy up and clean up. If we can't, that's fine, Let it be. It's their home.

-- *Mandarin speaker in Markham*

Retaining Independence and Dignity

- Almost unanimously the respondents felt that they would better be able to maintain their independence if they had some financial assistance.
- Having to depend on their sponsor to provide them with money made them feel like a burden.
- Some financial assistance would allow them to take care of themselves and have some “pocket money” to make small purchases such as food and grocery.
- Many seniors said they would be in much better shape if they had their own independent living arrangement.

Retaining Independence and Dignity

- Some seniors were also adamant that they need to be active and have social connections within the community in order to maintain their independence.

- Community interaction helps them feel more a part of their new environment, thereby making them less dependent on their sponsors.

- Fluency in English is critical; the lack of communication skills hampered their ability to fully fit into their community and forced them to be much more dependent on their sponsors or others who could translate for them.

Other Implications of Inadequate Finances:

- Health care costs were often unaffordable
- Costs of medicine are often prohibitive
- Lack of coverage for dental care means bad teeth, leading to poor nutrition and poor health
- Dependence on sponsors and a lack of income is their biggest source of stress and poor mental health:
    - They have the funds neither to purchase items for personal care or hygiene nor to socialize in their communities

Other Implications of Inadequate Finances:

- Inability to travel anywhere except when family members will take them; they remain “stuck” at home and unable to see other people
- Increased vulnerability to abuse, since fear of losing their sponsorship when they have no resources of their own keeps them in dangerous situations
- Damaged relationships

EMPLOYMENT

It's not only the employers who aren't willing to hire senior workers; the employment agencies aren't interested in them either.

- Virtually all interviewees wanted to work.
- All wanted help to be more attractive job candidates.
- A govt't-sponsored agency should specialize in serving senior job applicants.
- Hiring older workers be included in the equity programs, with visible minorities, differently-abled workers, women, and First Nations applicants.
- Subsidized transport would enable seniors to apply and interview for jobs beyond walking distance.

Types of Elder Abuse Identified

Senior immigrant males experienced abuse that was:

- verbal
- physical
- financial
  - sponsorship breakdown
- emotional and other types of abuse; actually all types of abuse of parents by their children can be emotional abuse as well, in that it shocks them and totally violates their expectations of good filial behaviour

Types of Elder Abuse Identified

Verbal abuse included being:

- Yelled at by the seniors' children and/or their spouses, sworn at
- Told that they should go back to their home countries
- Threatened with breaking sponsorship once arguments arose.

Types of Elder Abuse Identified

Financial and other types:

- Seniors living with their children and continuing to have their money taken away
- Seniors thrown out of their homes and forced to find other homes and sources of income
- Seniors forced to go back to their countries of origin

Types of Elder Abuse Identified

Other types and combinations of types of abuse:

- Forcing a senior to live in a basement not designed for habitation
- Treating the seniors as though they are invisible
- Unspecified disrespect toward the senior
- Not feeding the seniors when they needed to be fed

Sources of Abuse included:

- cultural differences
- conflict with in-laws
- finances
- settlement difficulties (linked to finances)

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN AREAS SUCH AS:

- behaviour, public and private
- appropriate clothing
- earrings being worn by males (one senior was thrown out for objecting to this)
- childrearing differences between spouses of different cultures

CONFLICT

- **Conflict between seniors and their children's spouses** were not infrequent

- **Finances** were most often mentioned as the major, sometimes the only, sources of stress, conflict, and ensuing abuse.

- Seniors quickly acknowledged that **their children struggled with their own financial problems**, which inevitably led to stress among the entire family, and that settlement costs for a family were huge, draining the family's time and energy as well as money.

Thank you!