Immigrants and Public Health

Metropolis

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Mental Health and Immigrant Populations

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Outline

- Background to policy brief
- Mental health
- Context: Immigration
- Literature review findings
  - Individual, Intermediate, and Systems influences
- Policy recommendations
- New directions

Background to Policy Brief

- Presentation on "Immigration and Mental Health" at Canada School of Public Service's Armchair Discussion in February 2008
  - http://canada.metropolis.net/mediacentre/Immigrant_Mental_Health_Khanlou_feb08_e.ppt

- Public Health Agency of Canada and Metropolis Canada

- Presentation as part of "Mental Health of Immigrants & Refugees: Research, Practice & Policy Implications" workshop at 11th National Metropolis Conference in March 2009

Definitions and Limitations

- Focus on mental health of migrant populations
  - Mental wellbeing
  - Immigrant/ migrant category

Newcomers to Canada

- Important to distinguish between status
  - Immigrant
  - Refugee
  - Precarious status

- Also helpful to distinguish between phases
  - Pre-migration
  - Migration
  - Post-migration

Khanlou, N. (2008). Young and new to Canada: Promoting the mental wellbeing of immigrant and refugee female youth. International Journal of Mental Health & Addiction, 6(3), 513-516.

Khanlou, N., & Guruge G. (2008). Chapter 10: Refugee youth, gender and identity: On the margins of mental health promotion. In: Hajdukowski-Ahmed M, Khanlou N, & Moussa H (Editors) Not born a refugee woman: Contesting identities, rethinking practices. Oxford/New York: Berghahn Books (Forced Migration Series).

Mental Health

- Without mental health there is no health
- More than the absence of mental disorders
  - "a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community"
- Determined by socio-economic and environmental factors
- Linked to behaviour

World Health Organization. (2007). *Mental health: Strengthening mental health promotion.* Fact Sheet # 220. Available URL: http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs220/en/

Context: Immigration (2006 Census)

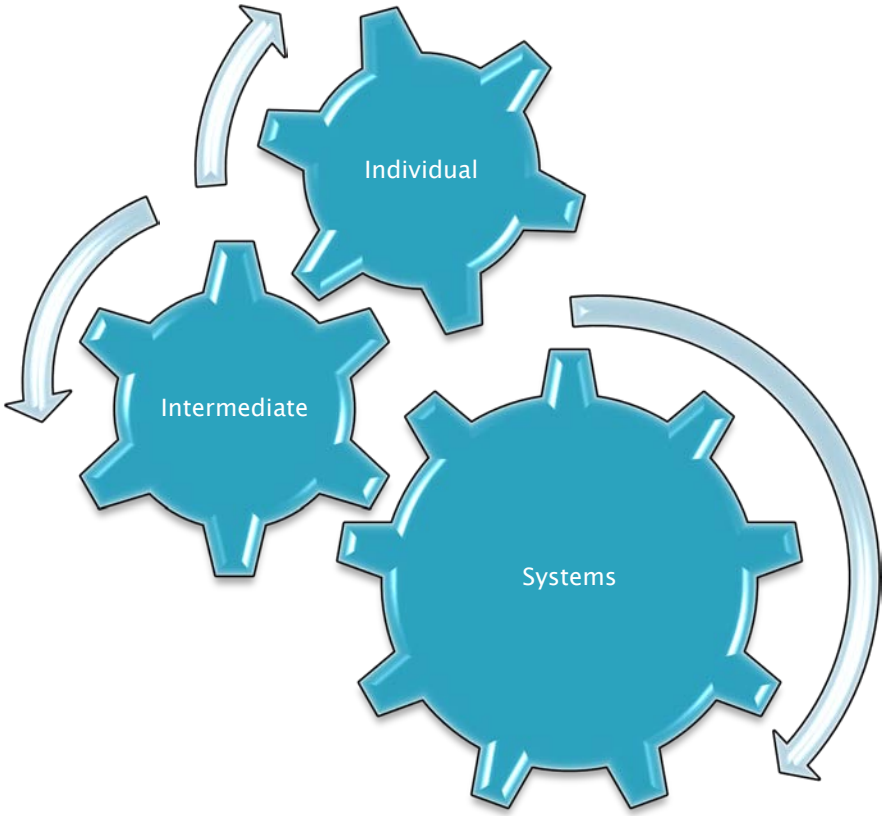
- Over 6 million foreign-born (close to 20% of population); highest proportion in 75 years
- Between 2001-2006, over 1 million immigrants to Canada
- Approximately 60% of newcomers from Asia (compared to 12% in 1971), 16% from Europe (62% in 1971), 11% from Central and South America, and 11% from Africa
- Over 70% of foreign-born mother-tongue other than English or French (over 18% Chinese, over 6% Italian)
- Close to 70% of recent immigrants in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver
- Most foreign-born (85%) eligible for Canadian citizenship, naturalized

Note: Numbers above have been rounded.

Statistics Canada. (2007). *2006 Census: Immigration, citizenship, language, mobility and migration.* The Daily: 4 December 2007. Available URL: http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/071204/d071204a.htm

Systems Approach

- Individual (micro level)
- Intermediate (meso level)
- Systems (macro level)



Individual Influences

- Age
  - Limited research from lifestage perspective
- Gender
  - Significant influence on health status
- Cultural background, spirituality and religious identity
  - Variations in how mental health is viewed
  - Supportive role

Intermediate Influences

- Family and social support networks
  - Reliance on extended family members
  - Social networks (ethnic communities, religious organizations)

- Acculturation
  - Integration linked with positive mental health outcomes
  - Variable findings within context of discrimination

Systems Influences

- Economic barriers
  - Underemployment or unemployment significant risk factor for mental health of individual and entire family
- Appropriate services
  - Culturally sensitive, specific, and coordinated

Systems Influences (continued)

- Migration status and access to healthcare
  - Differential access, pre-migration status
- Prejudice, discrimination and racism
  - Impact on mental health

Policy Recommendations

- Intersectoral approaches to promoting migrant wellbeing
- Integrated community based mental health services
  - Social determinants
  - Gender and lifestage sensitive
  - Recognize both challenges and resiliencies

Policy Recommendations (continued)

- Education and training
  - Public education campaigns for migrants
  - Cultural interpreters
  - Health and social service providers and students

Policy Recommendations (continued)

- Remove barriers to economic and social integration of newcomers
- Longitudinal and comparative research

New directions

- Mental Health Commission of Canada
  - "Toward Recovery and Well-Being: A Framework for a Mental Health Strategy for Canada" (2009)
- Other recent releases
  - "Improving the Health of Canadians 2009: Exploring Positive Mental Health" (CIHI)
- Media features, conferences

New directions (continued)

- Attention also needed on specific sub-groups of population
  - Immigrants
    - Diverse categories
    - Systems and intersectional approaches
    - Policy context

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