

Study Information

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Border(ing) Practices: Systemic Racism, Immigration & Child Welfare is a collaborative research project led by researchers at the University of Toronto and the University of Victoria working in partnership with child welfare, immigration, and gender-based violence service providers and advocates within Ontario and British Columbia.

This research aims to understand how immigration policies, in concert with systemic racism, shape child welfare policies and practices with children, youth and families.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Immigrants represent a sizable proportion of Canada's population, with 1 in 5 people (21%) identifying as foreign-born in the 2018 Census, the majority of whom are also racialized as "visible minorities" who originate in countries in Asia and Africa. While Canada continues to admit high numbers of permanent residents (i.e., newcomers), a growing proportion of immigrants have a precarious legal status as temporary workers, students, refugee claimants or undocumented residents. Immigrants with precarious status face numerous barriers to accessing services, experience economic hardship, have higher rates of transnational family separation, and often fear being deported from Canada if they seek help from health or social services.

While child welfare services are paying closer attention to racial disparities among Indigenous and Black children that interact with their services, the role that immigration status plays in child welfare practices remains poorly understood.

WHAT WE ARE DOING

Using an intersectionality-based research design, our research objectives aim to:

- 1) Critically analyze how social work research with immigrants in Canada attends to racism and precarious migratory status.
- 2) Examine how child welfare policies and regulations guide child abuse assessment and services with immigrant families in ON and BC through: a) discourse analysis of policy documents and b) in-depth interviews with policymakers and service providers working with immigrants.
- 3) Foster knowledge exchange among service providers and immigrants who are directly impacted by child welfare services towards improving equitable outcomes for racialized immigrants.

RESEARCH GOALS (Jan to July 2022)

- **Continue ethnographic observation** of workshops related to systemic racism, gender-based violence and/ or child welfare.
- **Conduct individual and focus group interviews** with child welfare policymakers and service providers working in ON & BC.

OUTREACH/DISSEMINATION GOALS for 2022

- **Host community forums** to discuss shared concerns and advocacy goals that support immigrant families involved with child welfare services.
- **Facilitate webinars and workshops** on critical service navigation for racialized immigrants who have a precarious status.

WHAT WE ARE LEARNING

Social Work Research with Immigrants in Canada

- Out of 124 social work articles in our sample, the term immigrant is often undefined or used ambiguously to refer to people who migrated to Canada.
- While some studies focus on immigrants who have a common ethnic or cultural identity (e.g. Black, South Asian, Chinese), relatively few studies include information on research participants' immigration status.
- A relatively small proportion of social work research includes an explicit anti-racist or anti-colonial lens.

Child Welfare Policies and Regulations in Ontario and British Columbia

- Three out of four policy documents we retrieved from the BC and ON governments make no mention of immigrants or immigration.
- When immigrants are addressed in policy documents, child welfare workers' use of discretion and the needs of the child (vs. the caregiver) are emphasized; attention to immigrants primarily focusses on cultural differences.
- There is newfound attention to the child welfare system's role in supporting children/youth in care to apply for citizenship, but less clarity around supporting caregivers who have a precarious status.

Silences at the Intersection of Gender-based Violence, Child welfare & Immigration

- Trainings on risk assessment for gender-based violence in immigrant communities pay less attention to children, child abuse, or child welfare involvement.

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