What you need to know

Visible minority immigrants are experiencing significant challenges and barriers in accessing health care, education and employment opportunities. This prevents the expansion of their capabilities and their full participation in the Canadian society. Immigrants need equal and appropriate access to opportunities, which could be facilitated through specialized, best practices in settlement services.

What is this research about?

Though migrants continue to be admitted on the basis of their high levels of human capital, visible minority immigrants experience barriers to access in health care, education, and employment. This study analyzed how these barriers affect the well-being and full development of the capacities of the fastest growing visible minority group – South Asian immigrants – in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA).

What did the researcher do?

This research framed human development as a process of expanding people’s choices and real opportunities to enhance their capabilities for a better quality of life. The researcher conducted 307 survey questionnaires and five focus groups with South Asian immigrants living in the GTA. The study investigated the challenges South Asian immigrants face in accessing the appropriate health-care, education, and employment opportunities that immigrants need in order to maximize the expansion of their capabilities.

What did the researcher find?

Barriers to access made participants feel as if they did not have the opportunity to live a full and creative life. They believed they were not living the quality of life they were expecting and thought their lives lacked alternatives and opportunities to choose from. Specific examples of these barriers and sentiments can be found below.

Most of the participants in the sample were between the ages of 30 and 49. They had high levels of education, were family oriented, and were part of a cultural community. They lived in the GTA and had been in Canada for at least three years.

The participants chose to settle in the GTA due to employment and education opportunities, the presence of similar cultural communities, and the possibility of a better quality of life.

Immigrants in the GTA have difficulties finding training, education, and professional development opportunities.
• Participants were not well informed about their new destination and they had an idea of a “dreamland.” When they arrived in Canada the reality they faced was different. They did not know what steps they had to take to overcome the challenges they encountered and how they could build their capability.

• The 90-day waiting period for the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) was a barrier to accessing health care services at a crucial period of settlement. Results also show that participants faced challenges in accessing culturally appropriate health care services.

• Although many of the immigrants’ educational credentials were recognized, they continued to face challenges and barriers in finding employment in their field of study. The data showed that immigrants do not always know how to capitalize on and apply their credentials and experience outside of their field. They were not aware of where they could find relevant training, education, and professional development opportunities that could advance their careers in Canada.

• Participants also faced challenges in accessing community resources such as employment and housing supports. The study confirmed that South Asian immigrants’ self-rated health declined after living in Canada. There is a strong association between barriers to access and the quality of life and capabilities of South Asian immigrants.

How can you use this research?

The growth of immigrants’ capabilities and their full participation occur when appropriate programs and policies are designed with their needs in mind. Recommendations include:

• Better informing potential immigrants by providing them with adequate information regarding access to health care, educational credentials, and employment opportunities.

• Abolishing the 90-day waiting period for OHIP and providing health education to immigrants and service providers.

• Reforming the process and structure of settlement services to make them more robust, appropriate, and specialized. Promoting best practices in settlement services to meet immigrants’ real-life needs.

• Creating a vibrant forum for ongoing discussion and research with immigrants, community partners, health care service providers, businesses, colleges/universities, and government representatives. This dialogue should focus on immigrants’ needs, realities, and challenges to find solutions that acknowledge immigrants’ contributions and validate their human capital.

About the researcher

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