Why we are Worried: The Facts

Immigrant youth

The number of immigrant youth aged 15 to 24 arriving to live in Canada has increased by 24.9 per cent over the last 10 years — from 28,125 in 1999 to 37,425 in 2008 (Shakya, Khanlou & Gonsalves, 2010, p. 98). About 80 per cent of youth who settle in Canada are from visible minority groups (Shakya et al., 2010, p. 98).

Like Aboriginal youth, immigrant youth, especially those who are members of a visible minority group, encounter racism and discrimination (Canadian Council on Social Development [CCSD], 2000). Many experience social isolation and struggle to feel a sense of belonging, which can lead to low self-esteem, anxiety, stress and depression (CCSD, 2000; Shakya et al., 2010, p. 99).

Integrating into a new country is a major life change. Key challenges for immigrant youth are learning a new language, adjusting to a different educational system and building social relationships in a foreign culture (Shakya et al., 2010, p. 99). And the differences in acculturation rates between parents and youth can cause family problems and tensions (CCSD, 2000). Disparities in services in neighbourhoods with high immigrant and racialized populations can also confront immigrant youth (Shakya et al., 2010, p. 100).

Generally, immigrant parents experience more difficulties than their children do in adapting to their new country, especially in learning the language and finding employment (CCSD, 2000). As such, immigrant youth are more likely to come from lower-income households: “Immigrants who have been in Canada for less than a decade are more likely to live in lower-income families than are those who have been in Canada for 10 years or more” (CCSD, 2000).

The economic situation of recent immigrants has worsened over the past decade (Canadian Chamber of Commerce, 2009, p. 2). For many immigrants, meeting basic needs such as adequate food and shelter can be a struggle (CCSD, 2000). In addition, difficulties integrating into the labour market can cause depression, family tensions and other mental health stresses on the family (Shakya et al., 2010, p. 100).

At the time of the 2006 Census, the unemployment rate among immigrant youth was 15.4 per cent, compared with 12.5 per cent for their Canadian-born counterparts (Shakya et al., 2010, p. 98). It should be noted that in contrast, the Canadian-born children of immigrants are significantly more successful than their parents or the Canadian average (Canadian Chamber of Commerce, 2009, p. 8); so those needing most support appear to be the foreign-born children and their families.

Immigrants of any age can experience difficulties with “first contact” services in the health-care system (Sanmartin & Ross, 2006). Youth do report feeling more comfortable with care providers who look like themselves and speak their language (CCSD, 2000).

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References