


HSS1101D: Determinants of Health




Determinants of Immigrant Health

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*NOTE: Information is taken from sources as indicated at the bottom of or within the slides.

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Topics to be Covered

- Exploring the Determinants of Immigrant Health
- Healthy Immigrant Effect
- Notion of Health Literacy
- Barriers and Challenges experienced by the Immigrant Population




***Recall: Determinants of Health**

- **Determinant (of health)**
 - A definable entity that causes, is associated with, or induces a health outcome. It may be a factor or combination of factors that can be classified as inherited or acquired. They include biological, behavioural, social, economic, cultural, and other factors. Any combination of these may be determinants of health. (Last, 2007)

Examples:
 Biological – predisposition to a disease due to family history or genetics
 Behavioural – healthy or unhealthy habits, lifestyle
 Social and cultural– education, race/ethnicity, religion, gender/sex
 Economic – income
 Physical environment – safe places, climate change, access to clean water and air
 Political environment – political stability, war/peace
 Health care system – access to health care services, healthcare coverage

A Dictionary of Public Health (Last, 2007)



Immigration & Minority Status

- Immigration refers to the process of moving or re-locating to another country with the purpose of settlement, for greater safety and security, or for temporary/permanent work/positions.
- Over the past 10 to 12 years, Canada has taken in about 1% of its population annually through immigration. In recent years, ~250,000 immigrants have come to Canada annually. Thus, immigration accounts for much of Canada's population growth.
- Poverty is especially prevalent among immigrant and refugee groups from Africa, South Asia, and Southeast Asia.
- Canadian immigration policies tend to favour educated, occupationally skilled, and young individuals.

Migration Health: Embracing a Determinants of Health Approach (Health Canada, 2010); Chapter 6: Health, Illness, and Medicine in Canada (Clarke, 2008)



Why is it important to study the health of the immigrant population?



Statistics – Immigrant Population

Some important statistics...

- According to the 2006 Census, immigrant families comprise 19.8% of Canada's population (a figure that is expected to rise to 25%–28% by 2031).
- 70.2% of the foreign-born population reports a mother tongue other than English or French.
- Approximately 2% of the population report that they do not know either of the two official languages.

Statistics Canada (2007, 2001); Migration Health: Embracing a Determinants of Health Approach (Health Canada, 2010) <http://www.healthcanada.gc.ca/hpr-bulletin>



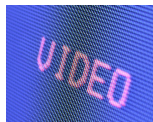
Immigrant Health and Determinants of Health

"We are now pursuing a determinants of health approach, which means looking at multiple factors and how they interact to affect the health of different populations. There is now more awareness of the importance of health inequalities and, in Canada, addressing these inequalities is one of the top priorities on Canada's public health agenda."

Migration Health: Embracing a Determinants of Health Approach (Health Canada, 2010)
<http://www.healthcanada.gc.ca/hpr-bulletin>



Video: Healthy Immigrant Effect



- **Immigrants' health declines the longer in Canada: study (3:33)**

<http://www.ctv.ca/CTVNews/TopStories/20110809/toronto-immigration-health-concerns-110809/>



Healthy Immigrant Effect

'Healthy Immigrant Effect' – Immigrants arrive in Canada healthier than Canadian residents, but their health declines over time

- Female and low income immigrants are more likely to report a decline in self-rated health over time

Also...

- 20% of visible minority Canadians report experiencing ***racism**
- Immigrants are less likely to access cancer screening and mental health services
- US evidence shows both direct and indirect impacts of racism on health (i.e. birth outcomes)
- These findings are as yet untested in Canada

Chapter 6: Health, Illness, and Medicine in Canada (Clarke, 2008); Migration Health: Embracing a Determinants of Health Approach (Health Canada, 2010)



Explanations for the Healthy Immigrant Effect

- Given that screening measures and procedures are in place, it is reasonable to assume that those who migrate may be healthier.
- Often those who decide to migrate (self-selection) – whether nationally or internationally – tend to be in the 'best' health.
- Loss in health advantage may be a result of normalizing into Canadian reality and society. Other factors may include poor health choices and behaviours, the social determinants of health (e.g., poor language ability; limited education; under- or unemployment; inadequate income; poor social support; etc).

Migration Health: Embracing a Determinants of Health Approach (Health Canada, 2010)
<http://www.healthcanada.gc.ca/hpr-bulletin>



Immigrant Health

- Life expectancy patterns and the 'healthy immigrant effect' indicates the relatively good health of new immigrants (e.g., better life expectancy; lower infant mortality; fewer low-birth weight babies; fare better with respect to major diseases and causes of death). However, self-reported health status comes closer to the rest of the country's population over time.
- The health of refugees is somewhat poorer than that of other immigrants, and they are more susceptible to infectious and parasitic diseases.
- Initially, many immigrants are relatively poor in the new country (e.g., academic qualifications and work qualifications may not be readily accepted).

Chapter 6: Health, Illness, and Medicine in Canada (Clarke, 2008)



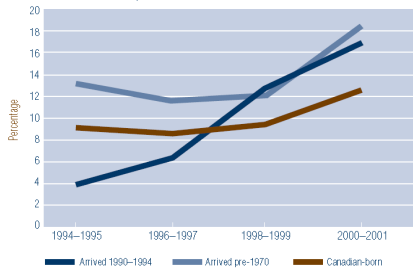
Cont'd Immigrant Health

- Immigrant sub-groups that tend to be at the highest risk of experiencing or reporting poor health include seniors, women, low-income immigrants, and recent immigrants who are members of a racialized group.
- Mortality rates among recent immigrants are substantially lower than the Canadian-born population; however, they tend to increase over time to that of the host country.
- Certain diseases and chronic conditions (e.g., stroke; heart disease; type 2 diabetes; certain cancers; etc) may be higher among immigrants than among the Canadian-born population.

Migration Health: Embracing a Determinants of Health Approach (Health Canada, 2010)
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Figure 1 Proportion of Canadian-Born Population and Immigrants Reporting "Fair" or "Poor" Health, by Arrival Cohort



Source: Howland KB. *Self-rated health within the Canadian immigrant population: Risk and the healthy immigrant effect.* *Social Science and Medicine*, 2005. 61

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<http://www.healthcanada.gc.ca/hpr-bulletin>



Impact of Communication Barriers on Immigrant Health

- Individuals facing communication barriers
 - may have a poor understanding of medical treatments
 - are less likely to access health care services
 - are less likely to ask health care providers questions or receive responses
 - are more likely to have costly medical tests and longer stays in the emergency department
 - may be at higher risk for medical errors
 - may be unable to express their wishes to health care providers resulting in poorer health outcomes and disempowerment

Baker et al. 1996; Hornberger et al. 1996; Jacobs et al. 2001; Carrasquillo et al. 1999; Rivadeneyra et al. 2000; Hampers et al. 1999; Jacobs et al. 2004; Pottie 2007



Immigrant Health & Health Literacy

- According to the Canadian health literacy survey, Canadians with low health literacy perceive themselves as having fair or poor health.
- **Health literacy** is described as a person's ability to understand, access and use health information and resources in order to make informed health decisions.
- Immigrants to Canada are among the groups most at risk for low health literacy due to language and socio-cultural issues.

Canadian Council on Learning 2007, 2008; Simich 2009; Rudd, Moeykens & Colton 1999



Health Literacy

Health literacy (HL) refers to the ability to:
i) understand, ii) access and iii) utilize – health information, resources and services.

- **Understanding:** learning to search for info; ability to comprehend info; feeling comfortable with the amount and complexity of information, resources and services.
- **Accessing:** establishing contact with services; acquiring or receiving information, resources and services.
- **Utilizing:** effectively and efficiently using information, resources and services, and integrating them into daily life.

Resch et al., 2010; Gulati et al., 2011



Potential Barriers to Health Literacy

- **Barriers to Understanding**
 - information and process too complicated; not using simple language (excessive use of medical jargon); accuracy of information
- **Barriers to Accessing**
 - fighting for services; being denied services ; time consuming; difficulty making initial/ongoing contact
- **Barriers to Utilization**
 - poor integration of resources into daily life; lack of cultural-sensitivity; lack of coordination and communication across services; transportation problems; disrespectful service providers and racism

Resch et al., 2010; Gulati et al., 2011



Video: Racism



- **Google Racism! (1:52)**
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pp-nQ0lpM_Y&NR=1



Racism in Canada

“According to Canada’s Ethnic Diversity Survey, 20% of people reported experiencing discrimination ‘sometimes or often’ in the previous five years. Almost one third (32%) of Blacks reported experiencing discrimination in Canada, compared with 21% of South Asians and 18% of Chinese.”

Migration Health: Embracing a Determinants of Health Approach (Health Canada, 2010)
<http://www.healthcanada.gc.ca/hpr-bulletin>



Determinants of Immigrant Health

*“The determinants that influence immigrants’ health over time are as varied as the social circumstances of their lives, but are largely related to **resettlement, adaptation and social integration.**”*

Migration Health: Embracing a Determinants of Health Approach (Health Canada, 2010)
<http://www.healthcanada.gc.ca/hpr-bulletin>



Determinants of Immigrant Health Operate on Multiple Levels

- **Macro-level** (e.g., government policies; societal and cultural factors)
- **Community-level** (e.g., characteristics of the physical environment; neighbourhood cohesion; access to resources and services)
- **Individual-level** (e.g., personal health behaviours and lifestyle; socio-economic status; education and employment)
- **Pre-movement factors** (e.g., disease patterns and socio-cultural factors of the country of origin)
- **Movement factors** (e.g., type and duration of migration)
- **Arrival factors** (e.g., economic, legal and cultural characteristics of the host community)

“The complex interplay of all of these determinants—those affecting all Canadians as well as those unique to mobile populations—has an influence on the changes in health status that immigrants experience after their arrival in Canada.”

Migration Health: Embracing a Determinants of Health Approach (Health Canada, 2010)
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Population Health and some Social Determinants of Immigrant Health

- Adequate income and suitable employment.
- Recognition of foreign credentials and qualifications.
- Social ties to family, friends, and supportive social networks in the wider community and society influence social integration, emotional well-being, and the ability to acquire information and seek help.
- English and French language skills.


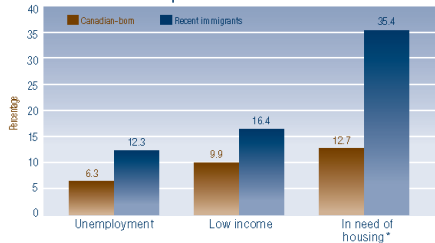

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Figure 2 Conditions Affecting Health of Recent Immigrants Versus Canadian-Born Population



*Households currently in housing that is inadequate, unsuitable or unaffordable.
 Source: Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2009.

Migration Health: Embracing a Determinants of Health Approach (Health Canada, 2010)
<http://www.healthcanada.gc.ca/hpr-bulletin> 

Sample of Interventions to Improve the Health and Experiences of Immigrants

- Conducting research on the determinants of immigrant health
- Funding and implementing community-based programs targeted towards immigrants to help reduce health inequalities (e.g., Community Action Program for Children; Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program)
- Improving access to affordable housing
- Offering a comprehensive system for child support/child care
- Providing accessible and innovative official language training
- Promoting protective factors (e.g., strengthening social ties)

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