



Bridging Our Communities ...
Building Our Collective Voice

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The Ethno-Cultural Council of Calgary (ECCC) is a community-based organization with a membership of 43 ethno-cultural organizations and over 40 individuals. ECCC was founded in 2002. Its mission is to facilitate the collective voice of Calgary's ethno-cultural communities towards full civic participation and integration through collaborative action.

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Executive Summary

Family reunification has long been a feature of the Canadian immigration context. In particular, the ability of individuals to sponsor their parents to come to Canada has been a cornerstone of Canada's commitment to new Canadians. Since 2008, there have been extensive changes to all aspects of Canadian immigration policy (Alboim and Cohl 2012). These changes include major revisions to the Family Reunification Program in Canada. This has directly impacted people's ability to sponsor family members and be reunited with loved ones.

In November 2011, the Federal Government stopped receiving applications for the Federal Family Reunification Program. In its place they created a special two-year visa called the 'Family Super Visa for Parents and Grandparents.' In May 2013, the government announced that they would re-open the program in January 2014. They also announced major revisions to program criteria (including higher income requirement for sponsors as well as a cap of 5,000 applications per year). The program re-opened in January 2014 but at the time of writing – February 2014 – the program had already reached the eligible number of applicants for the year and is no longer accepting applications.

Since 2012, the Ethno-Cultural Council of Calgary has been researching the impact of this moratorium on ethno-cultural and immigrant communities in Calgary: What are the impacts on immigrant families in Canada when they are prevented from being meaningfully reunited with family members? This report draws on fifteen qualitative interviews with individuals and families who were directly impacted by the moratorium on the family reunification program and the creation of the Family Super Visa for Parents and Grandparents. These interviews took place between May and December 2013.

The individuals interviewed for this project come from a diversity of backgrounds: Different countries of origin, cultural and faith backgrounds and linguistic communities. They came to Canada as skilled workers, as refugees and as sponsored spouses. What ties these disparate accounts together is a shared desire – based on a promise by the Canadian government – to sponsor their parents to come to Canada.

Drawing on these accounts, this report makes the following conclusions:

There are profound economic impacts to family separation: Contrary to the representation of sponsored relatives as a drain on the healthcare system and social services, we heard instead that sponsored parents and grandparents were playing critical roles as childcare providers that allowed their children to go out and become part of the workforce in Canada. When these family members are not

able to come to Canada, families are forced to cope on one income (thus lowering their tax contributions annually) and women, especially, are not able to enter the workforce.

These new policies disproportionately impact racialized immigrants and Canadians: Extended family networks are most important in ethno-cultural and racialized communities. The majority of sponsored parents and grandparents come from South Asian countries (VanderPlaat et al. 2012). Poverty rates are three times higher for racialized families than non-racialized families (Black and Galabuzi, 2011). Increasing the income requirements for sponsors and limiting the number of applications is disproportionately affecting low-income and racialized communities.

Family separation exacerbates the vulnerabilities already facing ethno-cultural children and youth: Along with the economic impacts of family separation, families are deeply concerned about the impact of these policy changes on their children. For many of the families we interviewed, their children had close relationships with their grandparents. These family members played an important role in supporting the healthy psychological and emotional development of young people – especially bicultural youth adjusting to life in a new country. Our research found that the extended family remains a critical and integral way of organizing family life, regardless of the distance between family members across countries and generations.

Family separation inhibits meaningful integration and settlement: For families living in Canada, barriers to family reunification are also barriers to feeling fully settled and integrated into Canadian life and society. Many immigrants chose to come to Canada – often instead of other countries – because of its promise of family reunification and the ability to sponsor their parents. Since 2011, family reunification has become, as one of our interviewees put it, “a cancelled dream.” This has meant that people who are trying to build a life in Canada – who have families, jobs and lives here – are required to maintain close financial and personal ties back home. This is especially the case as their parents age and require care.

Limits on parental sponsorship has potential demographic impacts: This research reveals that macro level policy changes – such as limiting the number of family members who can come to Canada – impact personal and familial decision making at the micro level. We found that the inability to sponsor parents was affecting family planning decisions, including the decision to postpone starting family. We can expect profound implications for the Canadian demographic landscape, which currently depends on immigrant families and their higher birthrates to promote positive demographic growth (Ferrer and Adsera, 2013).

Introduction

Since 2012 the Ethno-Cultural Council of Calgary (ECCC) has been undertaking research to understand the impacts of changing immigration policy on ethno-cultural communities in Calgary. As has been documented elsewhere, since 2008, Canadian immigration policy has undergone a series of significant changes that are expected to have far reaching impacts on the Canadian economy, society and demography (Alboim and Cohl 2012). The Ethno-Cultural Council of Calgary is a community-based organization that works to facilitate the collective voice of ethno-cultural communities in Calgary. As a council, ECCC represents 42 ethno-cultural organizations in Calgary, Alberta. ECCC's research priorities are determined by the Research and Policy Committee (composed of ECCC Board members and volunteers) and the ECCC Board of Directors. In 2012, the Board determined that understanding the impact of immigration policy on ethno-cultural communities in Calgary was strategic priority for the organization.

Family Reunification in Canada

Family reunification has long been a feature of Canada's immigration context though the number of people admitted through this stream has varied over time. Similarly, the type of people who are considered 'eligible' family members has changed over the decades (Deshaw, 2006). In recent years, there has been a marked decline in the number of family class immigrants admitted to Canada (from 39% in 1994 to 22% in 2012) (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012a). As the number of people admitted as family class immigrants and refugees has dropped, the number of people admitted as economic immigrants has grown considerably. This trend is likely to continue with major restrictions to parental sponsorship taking effect in January 2014. These changes include higher income requirements for sponsors and a cap on the number of applications that will be accepted.

In 2011 the government temporarily stopped receiving applications for sponsored parents and grandparents. The effect of this closure was felt strongly in Alberta as the moratorium at the federal level coincided with a closure of the Family Stream of the Alberta Immigrant Nominee Program. Thus, individuals in Alberta wanting to sponsor relatives (other than spouses and dependent children) were left without options between November 2011 and January 2014. In the interim, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) created a 'special' visitor visa called the Family Super Visa for Parents and Grandparents (hereafter called the Super Visa). This Super Visa differs from other visas in that it allows parents and

grandparents to come to Canada for a period of two years, renewable for a maximum of ten years. ECCC's research into this policy change and its impact took place during 2013. In May 2013, midway through the research, the federal government announced that it would resume accepting applications for the program in January 2014. The new program has revised application criteria for individuals wishing to sponsor a parent or grandparent. They include the following:

1. An increase of 30% to the minimum necessary income (MNI) for sponsoring parents and grandparents
2. Lengthening the period for demonstrating the MNI from one year to three years (families must demonstrate that they can meet the new income threshold of three consecutive tax years prior to submitting a sponsorship application)
3. Evidence of income confined to documents issued by the Canada Revenue Agency
4. Extending the sponsorship undertaking period to 20 years instead of 10 years
5. The Super Visa is now a permanent fixture of the immigration system

Perhaps most significantly, the revised family reunification program will accept only 5,000 applications per year.

The interviews for this research focused on understanding both the barriers people encountered in attempting to access the new Super Visa as well as the impact family separation was having on their lives. The government announced the new program just as ECCC commenced interviewing participants. The majority of participants were aware of the new program and its revised criteria and discussed what they perceived would be the impact of this new program on their lives. Generally, interviewees felt that the new program criteria amplified the barriers that they were already experiencing under the program moratorium – that is, the income requirements, CRA requirements and cap on applications – would serve as barriers to sponsorship.

Literature Review

The number and scope of changes to immigration policy in Canada over the last six years make research such as ours critical to informing the debate around who should be 'let in' and what parameters should be considered when creating immigration policy and determining selection criteria. The current government has been explicit about their goals for Canada's immigration system: To create a "fast,

flexible economic immigration system whose primary focus is on meeting Canada’s labour market needs” (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012b). This emphasis on economic immigration has yielded profound changes to policy that are far-reaching and will have significant impacts on Canadian society, demography and economy in the years to come.

Because changes to Canada’s family reunification program have only started to come into effect, there exists very little research exploring the impacts of these policies in Canada. An exception to this is a recent paper by VanderPlaat et al. (2012) entitled “What do sponsored parents and grandparents contribute?” The authors analyze the Longitudinal Survey of Immigration to Canada to explore the economic and non-economic contributions of sponsored parents and grandparents and comparing them to other immigrants of similar age in different categories. The authors find that despite much rhetoric to the contrary, the majority of sponsored parents and grandparents are “no more likely to be a drain on the Canadian social welfare system than other people their age or other immigrants” (VanderPlaat et al. 2012: 86) Indeed, two thirds of sponsored parents and/or grandparents were found either to be working, self-employed or ‘homemaking’ (which includes providing childcare). This paper provides a critical foundation for the work we present here. While VanderPlaat et al. use quantitative analysis and large datasets, our work draws on qualitative interviews and firsthand accounts. Both are relevant for advancing a more nuanced approach to thinking about immigration and the ‘contributions’ of sponsored relatives.

As an organization that works with newcomer and immigrant communities, we see firsthand the way that people’s lives are shaped by immigration policy: This is particularly true of family reunification policy which determines which family members can come to Canada and when. This research is an effort to further interrogate the intersections between immigration policy and everyday life – particularly the economic and psychological survival strategies of immigrant families in Calgary. This effort draws on the work of scholars interested in ‘alternative’ contributions by family members in immigrant households. In particular, feminist scholarship that examines ‘hidden’ work by women in the family (McLaren and Black 2008; McLaren and Dyck 2004). This body of work critiques more normative discourses of human capital and economic outcomes used to measure immigrant integration (McBride 2000). Human capital theory posits that the more skills and education an individual has, the more likely they are to succeed in the labour market and be ‘contributing’ members of society.

In addition to critiquing human capital and presenting a more fulsome perspective on the contributions of various family members (in this case sponsored parents and grandparents), our work draws on existing literature around the work of grandparenting. Several studies in the last few years have focused on ethno-specific communities and examined the role that grandparents play in supporting settlement and integration by families in Canada (Aggarwal and Das Gupta 2013; Dossa 2006; Mehta and Singh 2008; Man 2004; Zhou 2013). This work explores the kinds of support and assistance that immigrant grandparents offer to their families in Canada. Of particular relevance – and echoing much of what our own research found – are the contributions of unpaid childcare, which allows both parents to work outside the home.

These contributions by grandparents remind us that we need to imagine ‘family’ outside of the limits of the western nuclear family unit. Extended families remain the dominant form in many cultures. Despite suggestions that extended family networks are on the decline (Collacott 2013), our research finds that in fact, for many families, extended family relations are not only of central importance but that these relationships provide critical support (economic, psychological and emotional) to immigrant families in Canada. This resonates with recent research on immigration and the family that tells us that families are the “primary agents of migration with decisions based on collective family consideration rather than individual concerns” (Lewis-Watts 2006: 3; see also Creese et al. 2011). Similarly, emerging scholarship on the ‘transnational family’ (Baldasser et al. 2007; Landolt and Da 2005) points to the ways in which – even in the wake of migration, separation and relocation – family networks remain intact and critical to the economic and psychological survival of the transnational family.

Methods and Data

The results presented in this brief should be understood within the wider context of ECCC’s research framework on immigration. Starting in early 2013, ECCC held a series of informational workshops outlining the major changes to immigration policy. The content of these workshops included a discussion of the major changes to all three streams of immigration: Economic, family class and humanitarian. These workshops were delivered to ECCC members and partners. Following the workshops, participants were invited to attend a focus group to discuss their perspectives on these changes and what impact, if any, they anticipated they might have on their communities.

From the focus groups, ECCC determined that changes to the family reunification program were an issue of significant concern for ethno-cultural communities in Calgary, specifically, the moratorium on parental sponsorship (imposed November 2011) and the creation of the Family Super Visa for Parents and Grandparents. Based on this area of interest, ECCC narrowed its research focus to individuals who were directly impacted by these policy changes. For the purposes of this work, 'directly impacted' included the following:

- Individuals who wanted to bring parents and/or grandparents to Canada through a sponsorship program but are now having difficulty
- Individuals who have applied for the Family Super Visa for Parents and Grandparents for themselves or for others
- Individuals who are currently in Canada on a Super Visa for Parents and Grandparents

The data presented in this paper are drawn from interviews conducted with individuals from Calgary's ethno-cultural communities who were directly impacted by the moratorium on the program to sponsor parents and grandparents (see Table I "Interviewees"). The data presented herein are drawn from case studies with 12 individuals and 2 couples. Ten of the 14 interviews were with women and the remaining five were with men. The majority (ten) of interview participants came to Canada through the Federal Skilled Worker Program. One came as a refugee, two as sponsored spouses and one through the Alberta Immigrant Nominee Program. Six of the participants are permanent residents; the other eight are Canadian citizens. All participants had been in Canada for less than ten years, and most had been here for around five to eight years, three participants had been in Canada for one to three years. Participants came from China, India, the Philippines, Colombia, Ethiopia, Bangladesh and Vietnam.

These interviews took the form of in-depth conversational interviews with self-selected candidates (see Appendix A for interview questions). Participants were recruited using the snowball method and drawn from ECCC's networks in Calgary's ethno-cultural communities. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were coded by the researcher using open coding and analyzed using a method derived from grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin 1998). The initial coding revealed multiple units of data that were then re-analysed, collapsed and integrated into broader themes. Each participant was given a pseudonym to protect their identity and maintain their anonymity.

Table I - Interviewees

Sex	Immigration Category	Immigration Status	Country of Origin	Years in Canada
Female	Federal Skilled Worker Program (FSWP)	Citizen	Colombia	5
Female	Sponsored Spouse	Citizen	Colombia	7
Female	FSWP	Citizen	Vietnam	8
Female	FSWP	Citizen	India	5
Female	FSWP	Permanent Resident (PR)	Philippines	1
Female	Provincial Nominee Program	PR	Philippines	8
Female	FSWP	PR	China	1
Male	FSWP	Citizen	Philippines	7
Female	Non-immigrant	Citizen	Canada	3
Male	Sponsored spouse	PR	Philippines	3
Female	Refugee	Citizen	Ethiopia	8
Female	FSWP	Citizen	Bangladesh	7
Male	FSWP	Citizen	Bangladesh	7
Male	FSWP	PR	India	3
Female	FSWP	PR	India	3

Findings

Drawing from the fourteen interviews conducted for this research, the following section will address five key ‘impacts’ of this policy change. The first addresses the barriers faced by research participants in accessing the Family Super Visa. In this section, we explore the financial barriers as well as the way in which the Super Visa exacerbates – rather than addresses – family separation. In the second section, we explore the economic impacts that this policy change is having on families in Calgary, in particular, the costs of childcare and long-distance eldercare, and what these costs mean for immigrant families. The third impact we explore is how family separation affects ethno-cultural youth in Canada. Here we examine the contributions of grandparents in transmitting cultural and linguistic values to their grandchildren and the critical importance of this inter-generational sharing. The fourth impact we touch on is the impact that this policy is having on immigrant settlement and integration, specifically the psychological and emotional impacts of family separation. The last impact discusses the potential demographic impacts that may result as a product of this policy change. These impacts are pulled together and discussed in the conclusion at the end of this paper.

Barriers to accessing the Family Super Visa

The Super Visa is for super rich immigrants...You have to be rich or your income has to be super high in order to afford not only your own living expenses but also your parents’ living expenses but also Canadian health care services. (Marisol)

For families seeking meaningful reunification with parents and grandparents, the Super Visa does not present a viable alternative. The Super Visa presents two major challenges to families hoping to be reunited in Canada: The first is the prohibitive costs associated with the Visa, the second is the fact that, as a visa, it prevents families from making long-term plans beyond the period of the visa. That is, despite the government’s efforts to suggest that the visa presents an alternative to sponsorship, research participants felt that the visa further impeded their goals of reuniting as a complete family unit.

For the majority of participants, the costs associated with the Super Visa were simply too high to be manageable. Most families opting to bring a parent or grandparent to Canada preferred a regular six-month visitor visa to the Super Visa. This choice was made for financial reasons: While the Super Visa requires families to purchase two years of health insurance worth a minimum of \$100,000 of coverage

(paid in total before the visa is issued), the regular visitor visa allows families to pay for insurance on a monthly basis. For the families we spoke to – many of them young families with children – coming up with the two to three thousand dollars required for insurance presented a major barrier. Anh, a Canadian citizen originally from Vietnam and mother of two, pregnant with her third, stated:

For us if we could afford to bring our parents here [on the Super Visa] we could also afford a live-in caregiver who can help, but for those families who cannot afford bringing in their parents they can't afford a live-in caregiver either, so it's a trap. They have no support.

Coupled with paying for a return airline ticket, the application fee and the costs associated with the visa (including having documents notarized etc.), families felt the regular visitor visa was a more economically viable option than the Super Visa.

Hilda's account presents an illustrative example of this decision-making process. Hilda and her husband moved to Canada in 2012 from the Philippines. Her husband currently works as an engineer in Calgary's oil and gas sector. They have three children aged 13, 12 and 10. Hilda is currently looking for work in her profession. Hilda's siblings are all living in Canada, her mother is a widow and as such is without immediate family in the Philippines. Hilda's mother is in her late sixties and Hilda's primary desire to sponsor her mother is make sure she can be with family as she ages.

"When I inquired [about insurance], I had to pay \$2400 at least...for one year's coverage, I mean, it's not even the substantial \$100,000, for \$100,000 insurance coverage it's \$2400, I had to pay for a one-year ticket which is another \$2000, so that's \$5000. I had to pay for the medical, I had to pay whatever, so it would come up...so all in all plus whatever expenses I will have here, like you have to notarize documents...I said, it's going to be too much, why don't I just apply for a visitor's visa first, I mean a normal one...I decided to get her the visitor's visa instead and give it a try..."

In addition to the prohibitive costs associated with the Super Visa, participants did not feel that it presented a meaningful alternative for their desire to be reunited with family members. Hilda again:

[The visitor visa is] the same thing anyway, it's the same thing, because if she comes here on a visitor's visa, she could stay six months, I could extend her for another six months...But the thing is, for me, it defeats the whole purpose, like in my case, my mother is alone, almost seventy years old, and all the family is here. The purpose of family reunification is to reunify the family and now you

are, the government is trying to say, you have the Super Visa anyway, but that's temporary, that's not reunification, it defeats the whole purpose.

This sentiment was echoed throughout the interviews with families trying to find ways to bring their parents and grandparents to Canada. Carolina has been a Canadian citizen since 2011. She moved to Canada in 2006 from Colombia and was sponsored by her husband who was already living here. Both she and her husband are working full time. Carolina is also studying to become registered in her profession. She wants to sponsor her mother, aged 60, to come to Canada. Carolina is considering starting a family and is concerned both with childcare and having family support here if she has children. Like Hilda, Carolina believes that the Super Visa offers “the illusion of family of reunification”:

You have the opportunity to have your family here, they make a life, ten years, two years even, don't go to ten years, but only two years, you make a life here, you are carrying with you your bags and you have to establish yourself for two years, even if it's only for six months, you have to find a place, make all this effort to organize the family and everything and after that everything is gone because you have to leave the country...The Super Visa is really nothing, you know, if you really see that, the purpose of bringing your family is because you want them to stay here...

These barriers – the prohibitive costs and the reality that the Super Visa fails to provide a long-term solution to family separation – undermine suggestions that it presents a logical alternative to a family sponsorship program. Because the Super Visa was brought in just as the sponsorship program was closed and because it features prominently on the CIC website where families seek applications to *sponsor* relatives, suggests that government sees that as a reasonable alternative to sponsorship. For the families we spoke to, this simply was not the case. It is also worth noting that visitor visa rates are much higher for European and American applicants and significantly lower for those coming from Africa, Asia and the Middle East (OCASI 2012). It is also the case that countries in regions including Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East are over-represented among those on which Canada has imposed visa restrictions (ibid). As it is still in its infancy, it is impossible to gauge the long-term impacts of the Super Visa. Our research, however, indicates that 1) the Visa is out of reach for many low- and middle-income immigrant families and 2) that the Super Visa fails to meet the needs of those families seeking to be reunified with a family member.

Economic impacts of family separation

Much of the justification behind the revised program criteria and the cap on applications for this sponsorship program has been economic. The CIC information package about the changes discusses the cost of elderly people on the health care system and Canada (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2013). The language by government officials about the changes has articulated the need for Canada to be cautious in its “generosity” (CBC 2013). We were also curious about the economic implications of this group of immigrants in Canadian society. Contrary to the representation of sponsored relatives as a drain on the healthcare system and social services, we heard instead that sponsored parents and grandparents were playing critical roles as childcare providers that allowed their children to go out and become part of the workforce in Canada. When these family members are not able to come to Canada, families are forced to cope on one income (thus lowering their tax contributions annually) and women, especially, are not able to enter the workforce. In addition to childcare, the families we interviewed discussed the cost that long distance elder care was having on their families. This, like childcare, has an unseen, often unacknowledged, impact to the Canadian economy.

Childcare

Of the fourteen families interviewed for this project, ten families stated that childcare was their primary reason for bringing a family member to Canada. The prohibitive cost of childcare coupled with a shortage of regulated spots in Alberta is an issue affecting families across the province, regardless of immigrant status (Breitkreuz et al. 2013). In 2008, there was a regulated childcare space available for fewer than one in five children in Alberta (ibid) – this gap has likely only been exacerbated by the growth in Alberta’s population (especially young families) and the continued divestment in social programming (Public Interest Alberta 2012). According to recent analysis the average cost of infant care is often over \$1,000 per month in Alberta’s major cities. This is approximately \$400 per month higher than the maximum subsidy support available from the province for low-income families eligible for subsidized care (Smith 2013). Coupled with the need for two incomes, immigrant families with young children are left with few options. Neha - a mother of two children under the age of five - wanted to bring her mother here so she could help with childcare (among other reasons). As she put it, quite simply: “Both [parents] need to work, it’s mandatory. Like you both have to work to survive here. It’s like that.”

Similarly, Helina, originally a refugee from Ethiopia, now a Canadian citizen, has a four year old and a newborn. She works as a nurse attendant and her husband works in shipping for a large company in

Calgary. She is currently home on maternity leave and anxious about returning to work given the costs of childcare. Helina has been trying to sponsor her mother since 2011 before the program closed, with no success:

“In Alberta, especially Calgary, you are paying daycare, about \$1000 [a month], I was paying for my four-year-old, for one child, so I was worried. I’m going [in a] couple months, I am going back to work, my husband is working morning shift, I am working morning shift until 3:00, my husband until 7:00, so who is going to take care of the children? ... So I was worried, really, from now I am just worried, I can’t pay \$2000. My child is starting kindergarten which is just three hours.”

For immigrant women like Helina and Neha, access to affordable, quality childcare presents an enormous challenge. Helina and her husband are considering taking out a loan to cover the costs of the Super Visa. If they are not able to get a loan to cover the upfront costs of the Visa, Helina will leave her job as a nurse attendant to look after her children until they are both in school. This was also the case of Neha: Despite a strong desire to work and bring an income to her family, she was instead staying home with her young children, unable to afford the prohibitive cost of childcare:

Neha: If you are having one person earning only, my husband is earning. I am not earning. I am a stay-at-home mom, so it’s hard.

BB: And if your mother were to come here permanently what kind of support would she offer you and your family?

Neha: She can stay here, take care of my kids, so that I can work...She can drop kids off and pick them up from school, and cook for them, we can both work...The reason is if they both need to work. It’s mandatory. Like you both have to work to survive here. It’s like that. We are cutting our expenses. That is how we are managing right now.

Along with the financial barriers of accessing childcare in Alberta, childcare fails to meet the needs of many immigrant families working shift work or unconventional hours. Many of the families interviewed for this project had jobs with unconventional hours: 12 hour shifts; overnight shifts in hospitals or other unusual work arrangements. These work arrangements require flexibility, and, for the families we spoke with this flexibility often ended up looking like having one parent – in these cases the mother – forgo her own labour market participation to look after her children and allow her husband to go out and work. As is the case with Helina, she will likely give up her job because she will not earn enough to pay for childcare nor have the flexibility of picking up her child from three hours of kindergarten to drop him at daycare that is required. This means giving up her income tax contributions and adding greater financial strain to her household.

Work outside the home

While childcare was listed as one of the most significant contributions that a sponsored parent would bring to their families in Canada, several participants also mentioned that their parents were still young enough to find paid work in the labour market. The majority of interviewees had relatively young parents – in their late fifties and early sixties – who, along with providing critical childcare and family support, would also look for work outside the home. Families who had parents in Canada on a visitor visa were often frustrated that their parents – despite having employable skills – were not able to work. Carolina – whose mother is in her fifties – stated: “That’s why we start thinking to bring her to Canada because she is still young, I think that she can have a better possibility to find jobs here.” This echoes what VanderPlaat et al. (2012) found in their analysis of the LSIC, that the average age of a sponsored grandparent in Canada is 60 years old and that the majority of these immigrants are either employed in the workforce or providing childcare at home.

Costs of long-distance elder care

Overlooked in the public discussion surrounding the cost of elderly people on the healthcare system in Canada (Gunter 2012; Collacott 2013) is the not insignificant cost of long-distance elder care assumed by many immigrant families in Canada today. All of the families that we spoke to for this project were sending financial assistance back home. In the case of a sick or hospitalized relative, the costs were even greater and more money was leaving Canada and headed to care workers overseas. One interviewee commented on the irony that as nurses, he and his wife were in Canada caring for elderly Canadians and yet unable to care for their own aging relatives: “We’d rather be the ones taking care of him, it’s ironic that we take care of other people here in Canada being registered nurses and can’t even take care of our father-in-law at home.”

Along with sending money for care back home, many interviewees reflected that if their parent became sick or hospitalized they would feel obligated to return home to provide care. Carol – a recent arrival from China – told us as the product of the one-child policy in China, she was the only person left to care for her aging parents: “If they get sick I have to fly back and stay there until they recover...It’s very disruptive and I cannot concentrate [on] my work here, I cannot concentrate to make my effort, to earn money to pay tax, I have to pay money to the flight.”

Hilda, with all her siblings in Canada and her mother widowed in the Philippines made a similar comment: “God forbid, something happens, you are here, you are working, you are in the peak of your work, you have to go back to your home country...and that disrupts, that disrupts the family schedule, your work schedule, your husband’s schedule...”

Summing up the economic impacts

In the public debate over family class immigration and parental sponsorship, much has been made about the burdensome cost of elderly immigrants on the health care system (Collacott 2013; Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2013) As VanderPlaat et al. (2012) point out much of the debate around this issue is grounded more in ideology than in evidence. Their research goes a long way to debunking many of the popular myths that surround this group of immigrants – including their economic contributions to the household. Our findings echo what they – and others – have found around the critical role that these sponsored relatives play in the economic survival and integration of their families in Canada.

Several studies of particular immigrant groups find the same thing: Arlene Tigar found that for South Asian families living in Vancouver “Childcare and domestic work are essential to their children’s livelihoods, and particularly helpful to mothers.” (Tigar 2006). Leung and McDonald (2001) found the same with Chinese grandparents and Aggarwal and Das Gupta (2012) found the same with Punjabi Sikh grandmothers in Toronto. What these results point to is the way in which the contributions of grandparents are neither incidental nor ancillary to the success of an immigrant family in Canada, rather, this family support plays a critical role in supporting the settlement and integration of immigrant families in Canada. As we found, when grandparents are not able to come to Canada, immigrant women are left with few options, the most likely of which is not entering or, worse, leaving the workforce to provide care to their children.

Ultimately, the economic implications of these policy changes are racialized. The immigrants most affected by these changes are from source countries in the global south. While European and American immigrants may be able to afford the Super Visa, those from Canada’s top immigrant source countries (China, India and the Philippines) are facing profound barriers to family reunification. The economic implications of this policy change are likely to exacerbate the already profound income disparity between racialized (visible minority) and non-racialized Canadians and immigrants. Racialized Canadians earn only

81.4 cents for every dollar paid to non-racialized Canadians (Black and Galabuzi 2011:11). This is true even between immigrant groups: visible minority immigrants earn less than their white immigrant counterparts. As the cases above indicate, the cost of family separation is profound and while it currently falls primarily on the shoulders of immigrants – particularly immigrant women - it is only a matter of time before this impact will be felt in the broader Canadian society.

The impacts of family separation on children and youth from immigrant backgrounds

...[T]he emerging literature reveals the complex, challenging realities facing both first generation immigrant youth and second generation Canadian youth born into immigrant families. First generation immigrant youth often face linguistic, acculturative, psychological and economic challenges...Although second generation Canadian-born youth, as a group, tend to fare well economically, those from visible minority background experience significant inequities in their educational attainment and participation in the labour market. (Ngo, 2010: 8-9)

Along with the economic impacts of family separation, families were deeply concerned about the impact of these policy changes on their children. The importance of extended family networks in immigrant families has been documented extensively elsewhere (Bengston and Roberts 1991). Despite claims by some that these networks are becoming less important (Collacott 2013), our research found that the extended family remains a critical and integral way of organizing family life, regardless of the distance between countries and generations. This echoes Zhou's suggestion that "...while home can be geographically relocated, family as a sociocultural and economic unit, remains connected" (Zhou 2012, 3). While all families in this study spoke about the importance of grandparents in their culture, this was especially salient in the accounts by Chinese, Filipino and Indian families. The following quotes emphasize this point:

In our community, it's totally different from this community here in Canadian culture: it's like when you are young, your parents take care all your responsibilities. They care of you, for your studies, food, everything...And we, as children, we think if we started earning, it's our responsibility to take care of them when they can't earn, they are getting old. It's our responsibility. Even here, our parents always stay with us, they live with us and we take care. They take care of us when we were young, we weren't able, and now they are not able so we are supposed to take care of them, that is why we want them to be with us. (Neha)

It's our culture. We take care of our elders. It's just the way we are, we don't really have that practice of leaving home early and being independent from our parents...so having a family over is not only something that we decided to do but it's something we need to do...We don't see elderly people or parents as a burden to the family, in fact, we see them as productive members of the family, they could help us with, not even, even if they are not able to take care of our kids, just being there, it passes on that value to our kids. (Carlos)

In several cases, the children in the families we interviewed had spent their early years back home living with their grandparents. Several families recounted the struggles their children encountered moving to

Canada and often desperately missing that family member. Rachel is Canadian citizen who has lived much of her life overseas. Her husband, Angelo, is Filipino. They have been in Canada for three years and have a five-year-old daughter. Angelo's mother lived with them in the Philippines prior to the birth of their daughter. She is currently in Canada on a visitor visa: "This is the family unit that [our daughter] has known from birth. It includes my mom. When we moved here for that first year and a half, [our daughter] was miserable. She missed my mom so much. It's like a third parent."

Language retention & Identity

The challenges facing immigrant and second-generation visible minority youth in Canada are numerous (Anisef and Kilbride 2003, Kunz and Hanvey 2000; Suarez-Orozco and Todorova 2003). These include challenges at school, issues of discrimination, language learning and developing sense of belonging. In Canada, children and youth from immigrant families are more likely to live in poverty or in neighbourhoods with higher levels of poverty (Picot et al. 2009). According to Reitz and Banerjee (2007), second-generation visible minority Canadians are less likely than those of non-visible minority backgrounds and their own first generation Canadian parents to feel a sense of belonging to Canada (in Ngo 2010: 8). In the early years of their family's settlement in Canada, children might be relocated, switch schools and spend less time with their parents.

The parents interviewed in this project believed strongly that having a grandparent in the home helped mitigate these challenges. These grandparents provide stability and a sense of belonging. The childcare they provide not only allows parents access to the labour market and greater financial security, it also provides critical support to children struggling to find their place in Canadian society. Carlos articulated this:

Kids when they don't have roots and when they don't have concrete identities, strong, basis for their identities, they tend to waiver, just follow, they don't really assert, and they don't have that clear sense of self, and so the dilemma with kids here we noticed is that they are not, they have Canadian culture and they don't, those kids that don't invite the culture of their first generation, even grandparents become detached from the parents, and become detached from the relatives, back home. So they act Canadian, whatever that means, but then they don't really, let me be very honest with you, they don't really fit that well, because they look different, they sometimes act different, they eat different foods...so they don't fit in 100% and they are always struggling to fit in, that's the problem. They're always struggling to fit in, they're always trying their best to fit in, but somehow there's always barriers to 100% integration. Plus they lose that valuable

identity that they can bring to enriching Canada more. So they end up, losing that valuable asset that they can contribute and they can just surrender to whatever is there, they don't really have that sense of 'I'm important, my culture is also important, my parents' culture is also important and it's something I can bring to the table to improve things.'

This sentiment was echoed by many interviewed for this project including Anh, mother of two, from Vietnam. In her own family she had observed that her children had “rapidly disconnect[ed]” from their culture back home, including: “loss of language, also the lack of understanding or even living the culture that they came from, it's like missing some identity.”

She went on to say:

“The parents they are not at home as often and they don't have much time to spend with them and so it is actually the grandparents role to give them support and to help them understand who they are and identify or find their own identity. And they are also the ones who instil values of education and belonging.”

Along with the cultural aspects and values, language was a key factor in wanting a grandparent here in Canada. All participants stated that their children were learning and speaking their mother tongue at home. Many expressed a belief in the importance of speaking a second language – both for job prospects in the future and also as a key to valuing and understanding their cultural background and heritage. As Anh pointed out above, grandparents are often the constant at home in the lives of young ethno-cultural children, and they are the ones who help their grandchildren understand their mother tongue.

Summing up impacts on children and youth

Our findings resonate what other scholars have found vis-à-vis the importance of grandparents in the lives of children and youth (see Neborak 2013 for a summary). These relationships are especially crucial for ethno-cultural youth for whom the extended family unit may be the one they are most familiar with or were born into (with grandparents living at home). They are also critical for language learning, transmitting cultural values and providing a level of constancy as families' transition to life in a new country. Having an understanding of and valuing one's cultural background is not simply a nice idea to promote multiculturalism – rather it can play a critical role in helping ethno-cultural and immigrant youth develop healthy psychological functioning (Umana-Taylor and Fine 2004). This is in part due to the racism visible minority youth are likely to experience at school: Studies show that visible minority children as

early as kindergarten are forced to contend with racist incidents and questions around their ethnic identity (Katz and Kofkin 1997). Having a strong sense of and value for one's ethnic identity can be critical in staving off the negative impacts of racism on young people. This is especially salient in light of new research linking poor mental health among visible minorities to their experiences of racism and discrimination (Davies and Stevenson 2006; Zayas 2001 in Ngo 2010).

The psychological and emotional impacts of family separation

A major impact of family separation is the psychological and emotional stress that it engenders. While many families were motivated to sponsor a parent for financial reasons (namely childcare), for many families, being separated from an aging relative had a significant emotional impact on families here. This was especially the case where a parent or parents were left without family members to care for them back home. This was the case with both Hilda (whose mother was a widow and all her children were in Canada); Carlos (whose father-in-law was currently being cared for by his daughter but she was set to leave the country shortly as well) and Carol (from China and the only child in her family). Hilda reflected: “My mother is there all alone. So it’s not only me, but my other siblings as well, they are thinking all along about the welfare of our mother. It impacts on me. It impacts on my husband. It impacts on my family.”

Althea, a nurse from the Philippines whose husband works in software, has two young children. Besides the support with childcare, she feels strongly that having her parents in Canada would support her family in fully settling and integrating in Canada. As a former overseas contract worker in Qatar, she chose Canada because of the promise of family reunification. Her parents have been rotating here on visitor visas for the last five years and she is eager to sponsor them:

If your family is here you are more at peace. I know what’s happening to mom and dad...When my mom and dad are not here I feel that I am a visitor here. I feel like I am an overseas contract worker, because I was before, in Qatar. I don’t feel that I belong here, but I am here just to work.

Similarly, Carol, having experienced China’s one-child policy, is still strongly tied to her parents back home:

If they can come here, I don’t need to spend, currently I spend about four hours a week to chat with them over the internet...If my parents are here I can concentrate on my work, I can concentrate on my family, I can be with my family more successful...If all immigrants can concentrate their energy here, not spend one year here, two year here and then back home for two year and back here, I think it’s better to...build the local community.

Summing up psychological & emotional impacts

Both these cases reveal the way in which family separation prolongs and exacerbates the integration process for immigrants living in Canada. In 2012-2013 Citizenship and Immigration Canada spent nearly

\$600 million dollars on settlement programs across the country (CIC 2011). These programs are aimed at supporting the full and meaningful integration of newcomers in Canadian society. Despite the investment in these programs, less than half (47.1%) of immigrants in Alberta report accessing settlement services (Esses et al. 2013). There remain profound challenges to delivery of services for immigrants and newcomers. Our research here reveals that a major barrier to full integration – as described by our interview participants – is having family members overseas, particularly when their family plan revolved around sponsoring that relative to come to Canada.

The potential demographic implications of limiting parental sponsorship

Critics of family reunification suggest that this is the choice that families make when they decide to become immigrants: Family separation is an inherent component of the immigration process. Where this logic fails, however, is that for many immigrants, especially those who came to Canada through the Federal Skilled Worker Program, they chose to immigrate to Canada over other countries because of Canada's family reunification program and the possibility of being reunited with family members, especially parents. The majority of people interviewed for this research reflected this sentiment. Consider Marisol's situation. Marisol arrived in Canada from Colombia in 2008 through the Federal Skilled Worker Program:

I immigrated to Canada for many reasons: This is a great country, a world of opportunities, a safer country to live in but I also immigrated under the assumption – and not only the assumption but with the information that the government of Canada supported family reunification. And as I was doing my research, whether I should immigrate to Spain, the United States, Australia, Canada. Canada offered me the option of family reunification so that was one of the reasons that I chose Canada as my destination.

Upon arrival in Canada, Marisol, like many immigrant professionals struggled to find work that matched her skill levels and experience. She was successful in landing a communications position for a non-profit organization and made sure her income was sufficient to sponsor her mother. Marisol recounted the bureaucratic hoops she had to jump through to get her sponsorship application in order:

I was successful enough to land a professional job then I had to wait for the Canada Revenue Agency Notice of Assessment...The second step was getting documents together so that meant birth certificate and documents that demonstrate that my mother is my mother, so the main problem that I faced was that my birth certificate, I only had a copy, I didn't have the original, and I come from a country where getting those types of documents or getting a certified copy of those documents is very difficult...Finally when I had all that ready and I had completed all the application forms which are very long and complicated, I was very, very disappointed that I couldn't hand in my application.

For Marisol, the reopening of the program in January 2014 presents little hope: The limit on the number of applicants (5,000) plus the increased income requirements and needing three years of CRA Notice of Assessment all present barriers to bringing her mother to Canada. For Marisol, these policy changes

represent a betrayal of a commitment made to her by Canada. She – like others we spoke to – is now a tax-paying, Canadian citizen who came here with the expectation and plan of sponsoring her mother:

I came here with an offer, it's like if you go to a job and they give you an offer and then when you get there you get surprised because it's not what your expected, it's not what you signed up for, this is not exactly what I signed up for...I chose Canada because it offered me the option of family reunification...

As a young professional in her early thirties, Marisol expressed that not being able to sponsor her mother was forcing her to rethink her family planning options: “It does worry me about my family planning. I start questioning myself about my family planning about...do I want to have children now? That's a question I have for myself. Do I want to have children with no family support network at all?”

Summing up demographic impacts

Marisol's account is one worth considering: As a relatively young immigrant professional with strong English and French language skills, Marisol is, in many ways, an 'ideal' candidate for Canada's new economic immigration program. Her success in finding a professional job in her field in Canada so quickly after arrival indicates that she is a well-integrated member of the Canadian society and economy. Her choice to come to Canada over other countries was predicated on the belief that she would be able to sponsor her mother to come. The inability to do that is now having an impact on her family planning decisions. Marisol's account points towards two troubling implications of this policy change: 1. That highly qualified and skilled immigrants will choose other countries over Canada as a destination for immigration and 2. That young immigrants such as Marisol will decide not to have children in Canada. If the latter is true, we can expect profound implications for the Canadian demographic landscape, which currently depends on immigrant families and their higher birthrates to promote positive demographic growth (Ferrer and Adsera 2013).

Conclusion

The way we see it is, it's Canada deciding on what it wants to be. Is it, are we just here because of the economic contributions that we're making? Or are we here as part of the big Canadian family? Which includes people we love and we want to take care of? It's just that. Are we here because we are productive workers and we pay our taxes or are we here because we're valued as a member of the family? (Carlos)

This research is an early attempt to understand the impacts of new federal immigration policy around family reunification in Canada. While these changes will take effect in January 2014, the moratorium on sponsorship applications and the creation of the Family Super Visa for Parents and Grandparents have presented an opportunity to assess what happens to immigrant families in Canada when they are unable to be meaningfully reunited with their loved ones. While this research focused primarily on the impact of the moratorium and the creation of the Super Visa, we believe that these results can be extrapolated to the impacts of the new policy regulations set to take effect in January. We make this extrapolation based on the fact that these new regulations simply add to the barriers that we presented here. That is, higher income requirements, requiring three years of CRA Notice of Assessments instead of one and the cap on application of 5,000 applicants, will actively limit the number of sponsored relatives who can come to Canada as well as hamper those who can sponsor.

In sum, research concludes that the limits on and barriers to sponsoring a parent or grandparent to come to Canada will have (and are now having) the following impacts:

- 1. There are profound economic impacts to family separation:** Racialized immigrant women in Canada earn 55.6% of the income of non-racialized men (Block and Galabuzi 2011). It is these women who are most impacted the dearth of accessible, affordable childcare options. As we heard, this lack of childcare is both keeping immigrant women out of the workforce and forcing them to leave good jobs to take care of their children. This is impacting not only their income tax contributions in their short term but limiting their job prospects in the future.
- 2. These new policies disproportionately impact racialized immigrants and Canadians:** Extended family networks are most important in ethno-cultural and racialized communities. The majority of sponsored parents and grandparents come from South Asian countries (VanderPlaat

et al. 2012). Poverty rates are three times higher for racialized families than non-racialized families (Black and Galabuzi 2011). Increasing the income requirements for sponsors and limiting the number of applications will disproportionately affect low-income and racialized communities.

3. Family separation exacerbates the vulnerabilities already facing ethno-cultural children and youth:

First and second generation visible minority youth face a number of barriers in adjusting to and gaining a sense of belonging in Canada. Our society depends on healthy and successful outcomes for these young people – who currently make up 20% of young Canadians (this number will grow to 25% by 2016) (Canadian Council on Social Development 2006). These youth represent Canada’s future workforce and future tax base. Grandparents play a vital role in supporting these young people – particularly at critical transitions. They are also transmitters of cultural identity and language – both of which support bi-cultural youth in their adaptation to life in Canada.

4. Family separation inhibits meaningful integration and settlement:

The Canadian government currently spends \$600 million of dollars on settlement programs in Canada. Most provinces and cities – including Alberta and Calgary – have ‘Welcoming Communities’ initiatives to support greater integration of newcomers in our province and city. These programs are costly and their success is difficult to measure. Our research reveals that a major impediment to meaningful integration in Canadian society is separation from parents, especially for those families who anticipated being reunited with parents in Canada.

5. Limits on parental sponsorship have potential demographic impacts:

As Canada competes on the global market for immigrants who can quickly and effectively integrate into the labour market, limits to parental sponsorship run the risk of turning qualified immigrants away. These limits are also impacting family planning decisions on the part of young immigrant women. Currently immigrant women who have been in Canada for five years “have almost twice as many children of preschool age as the average Canadian born woman.” (Ferrer and Adsera 2013). With the Canadian birthrate on the decline and the population aging rapidly, Canada depends on these immigrant families for a future tax base and labour force. Existing short-sighted arguments about

the cost of sponsored relatives on the healthcare system fail to take the economic implications of these family-planning decisions into consideration.

Along with the economic, social and demographic impacts outlined throughout the paper, it is worth being aware that the debates taking place over family reunification in Canada impact how Canada is imagined by its various constituents: These changes impact our ability to grow together as an inclusive and diverse country. As the quote above indicates: These changes make visible the gap that exists between those who are born here and those who immigrate here. What does it mean to be part of the 'Canadian family'? Half of the people interviewed for this research are Canadian citizens. The rest hope one day to become citizens. All are members of hardworking, tax-paying families. Many of them have young children for whom they imagine great futures. Current discussions that only value the monetary and economic contributions of various immigrants run the risk of further alienating Canada's more vulnerable populations. These changes reinforce a tacit hierarchy between those who belong and those who do not, those who are allowed to be with family and those who are not.

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Appendix A – Focus Group and Interview Questionnaire

Guiding Questions

(The conversational format will involve some flexibility in questioning protocol)

Focus Groups

The focus groups will be preceded by a short review of the changes to the Family Reunification program at the Federal and Provincial level, specifically the creation of the Family Super Visa and the Federal and Provincial moratoriums of the family stream of immigration

- Has anyone already been affected by these changes? For example, does anyone have a family member in process or an application returned?
- Is the Family Super Visa accessible to your family? Would you consider this option?
- Why is it important for immigrants to bring parents and grandparents to Canada?
- What role do parents and grandparents play in ethno-cultural communities? (i.e. childcare? Emotional support etc.)
- How will or will these changes affect you and your family?
- What do you think these changes will mean for your community?
- Have you or anyone you know been consulted on these changes?
- Are there other immigration policy changes that you are aware of that are affecting you or your family?
- Is there anything else that we haven't already discussed about changing policy that you would like to talk about here?

Interviews

The one-on-one interviews will be semi-structured and conversational in nature. These interviews aim at achieving several goals: 1) To better understand how macro-level policy changes (specifically changes to the Family Reunification Program) are affecting ethno-cultural individuals, families and communities 2) To contextualize an individual's personal narrative within the broader structural paradigms of nationalism, citizenship and immigration 3) To collect the much needed and to date under-represented perspective of ethno-cultural individuals and immigrants to Canada on the changing immigration context and, finally, 4) To inform future research on how immigration policy changes are affecting ethno-cultural communities.

Interviewees will be selected based on the accounts they bring to the focus groups, questions will be further elaborated depending on what the interviewee has already shared and be designed with their specific situation in mind.

That being said, here are some possible questions that may guide the interview:

- Can you tell me a little about your background? (How long have you been in Canada? What languages do you speak? What cultural background do you most identify with?)
- The purpose of this study is to understand how changes to the Family Reunification Program are affecting ethno-cultural communities in Calgary, what is your perspective on these changes?

- Are these changes having a direct impact on you/your family?
- If yes, can you describe what these impacts are?