

Health Profile on Immigrant and Refugee Children and Youth in Canada: Section 4

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4.1.1 What is Cultural Discordance?



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Immigrant and refugee children and youth living in Canada may experience the phenomenon of 'cultural discordance or dissonance'. This is defined as the perceived conflict or disagreement between the child/youth's culture of origin and the culture in Canada when it comes to social norms, behaviours and maintenance of one's heritage culture in the host society/country.¹

Often this happens when families come to Canada with young children – the children grow up learning and following Canadian culture, which may be different from their parents' heritage or home culture.¹ Two important areas of safety and security in the lives of immigrant children and youth are examined in the context of cultural discordance – bullying and peer aggression and suicide thoughts and attempts. In addition, sexual and reproductive health and cultural discordance are considered. These findings are based on a systematic review – [review the methodology here](#).

¹Rohmann A, Florack A, Piontkowski U. The role of discordant acculturation attitudes in perceived threat: An analysis of host and immigrant attitudes in Germany. *Int J Intercult Rel* 2006; 30:683-702.





4.1.2 Adaptation and Acculturation



Graphic created by CICH using an image from Stockvault.

Caring for Kids New to Canada tells us that immigrant youth move through four stages when they adapt to their new country. These steps are happiness and fascination; disappointment, confusion, frustration and irritation; gradual adjustment or recovery; and acceptance and adjustment. This process does not happen along a straight path – youth move forward and backward along the way. Cultural discordance can occur at any step along the way.

Learn more about adaptation and acculturation from [Caring for Kids New to Canada](http://profile.cich.ca/).





4.1.3 The Influence of Cultural Discordance



Graphic created by CICH using an image from Big Stock Photo.

The influence of cultural discordance is complex. The family environment of immigrant children and youth may differ from their school and social environment, which can lead to contradictory familial and societal expectations. It is possible that the tension that these children and youth feel from the differences in their home life compared to their lives in the greater community, especially at school, may be a concern for them. This situation may influence their sense of well-being and resultant behaviours, and may also influence their future-life-success.¹ On the other hand family ties and social resources could also buffer adversity, thereby protecting their well-being.²

¹Wilkins R, Tjepkema M, Mustard C, Choiniere R. The Canadian census mortality follow-up study, 1991 through 2001. Health Rep 2008;19:25-43.

²Child Health System Indicator Summary. 2006. (Accessed 2011, at <http://pcmch.on.ca/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=0bn1d-jliVU%3D&tabid=64>)

Implications

The context of children's lives, especially the influence of cultural discordance has not been extensively studied in Canada. This can result in a lack of information upon which to base effective services designed for immigrant and refugee children.





4.2.1 Safety and Security: Bullying and Peer Aggression



← 1st generation and non-native English speaking immigrants are more likely to report being victims of violence at schools than are their native English speaking counterparts.

Refugee status and advanced parental age are associated with increased parent to child aggression among immigrants from South East Asia. →



← Parent to child aggression is lower in first generation immigrant families compared to White and Black American families (in the U.S.).



Source: Pottie K, Dahal G, Georgiades K, Premji K and Hassan G. (2014). Do First Generation Immigrant Adolescents Face Higher Rates of Bullying, Violence and Suicidal Behaviours Than Do Third Generation and Native Born? J Immigrant Minority Health. doi: 10.1007/s10903-014-0108-6 <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs10903-014-0108-6#page-1>
Graphic created by CICH using images from Big Stock Photo and fotolia.

The findings depicted in this infographic suggest that experiences of bullying and peer aggression are higher among immigrant youth who are first generation and do not speak the country's official language(s) when compared to third generation and native-born youth. This suggests that the risks related to violence are greater when immigrant youth speak a language other than the primary language of their new country.¹ While this review only revealed findings based on American studies, the implications for Canadian immigrant youth are important. Studies showed that in most cases, a supportive, cohesive family – where all members live together – is associated with less violence.

¹Pottie K, Dahal G, Georgiades K, Premji K and Hassan G. (2014). Do First Generation Immigrant Adolescents Face Higher Rates of Bullying, Violence and Suicidal Behaviours Than Do Third Generation and Native Born? J Immigrant Minority Health. doi: 10.1007/s10903-014-0108-6; <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs10903-014-0108-6#page-1>





The Health of Canada's Children and Youth: A CICH Profile

Health Profile on Immigrant and Refugee Children and Youth in Canada

Section 4 – Immigrant Children and Youth – Cultural Discordance

4.2.2 Safety and Security: Suicide Attempts and Ideation



1st generation immigrant youth have lower suicide attempt rates than non-immigrant youth and 3rd generation immigrant youth.



Immigrant youth who are not living with their biological parents reported higher levels of life stress and suicidal thoughts than their counterparts who were living with parents.



Source: Pottie K, Dahal G, Georgiades K, Premji K and Hassan G. (2014). Do First Generation Immigrant Adolescents Face Higher Rates of Bullying, Violence and Suicidal Behaviours Than Do Third Generation and Native Born? J Immigrant Minority Health. doi: 10.1007/s10903-014-0108-6 <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs10903-014-0108-6#page-1>

Graphic created by CICH using images from Big Stock Photo.

The findings depicted in this infographic indicate that immigrant youth who were living with their biological parents had lower rates of suicide attempts and ideation than native-born or second- and third generation youth. In addition, studies showed that in most cases, a supportive, cohesive family – where all members live together – is associated with less suicide ideation. Conversely, immigrant youth who are not living together with their biological parents experience higher levels of life stress and resultant suicidal thoughts than those living with intact families.



Implications

In spite of the stress of adjusting to a new culture and cultural dissonance within families, immigrant youth appear to benefit from cohesive families. It also appears that uncommonly high rates of family violence may contribute to higher suicidal thoughts and attempts. Despite risks, the likelihood of suicide appears to be low. Researchers have suggested that this is due to cultural values and supportive families.





4.3.1 Sexual and Reproductive Health

 Cultural discordance, immigrant youth and sexual and reproductive health 	
Sexual activity	Young people who are confused about their cultural identity are more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviour.
Teenage pregnancy	Young people who are integrated into the culture of their new country are more likely to engage in early sexual behaviour and view single parenthood as a viable option. They also have higher education and occupational aspirations.
HIV prevention	In general young people are aware that unprotected sexual behaviour could lead to both pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.

Sources: Goodenow C, Espin OM. Identity choices in immigrant adolescent females. *Adolescence* 1993;28:173-84.; Blake SM, Ledskey R, Goodenow C, O'Donnell L. Recency of immigration, substance use, and sexual behavior among Massachusetts adolescents. *American journal of public health* 2001;91:794-8.; DeSantis L, Thomas JT, Sinnett K. Intergenerational concepts of adolescent sexuality: Implications for community-based reproductive health care with Haitian immigrants. *Public Health Nurs* 1999;16:102-13. Graphic created by CICH using an images from Shutterstock and fotolia..

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