

FOR IMPROVED INTEGRATION OF IMMIGRANT CHILDREN LESS THAN 6 YEARS OF AGE AND THEIR FAMILIES IN THE EASTERN TOWNSHIPS

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Context

Becoming aware of demands expressed by childcare workers and of comments from people working at the front line for support regarding immigrant children who show signs of developmental and adaptation problems, and not being able to find clear research results to guide our interventions, we have decided to undertake a research project with pre-school aged children, namely those between two and five years of age, who attend childcare services.

Considering the limited empirical data on the impact of immigration on the development of children, as well as our desire to define the reality such as it is playing out in the Eastern Townships region, our research was of an exploratory nature. It hinged around the following objective: to determine the potential impact of difficulties related to the social integration of immigrant families on the development and well being of immigrant children aged two to five in the Eastern Townships, specifically in Sherbrooke.

Research

This research project comprised two distinct phases, structured on the integration of immigrant children less than 6 years of age and their families in the Eastern Townships. **The first phase consisted of qualitative research**, conducted on immigrant parents of diverse origins and childcare workers. As for **the second research phase, it consisted of quantitative research** aimed at monitoring whether the parents' situation has an effect on the development of the child in the areas of motor skills, cognition, and socio-affective factors.

Representative Samples

The compilation of information was achieved through contact with the parents of immigrant families and childcare workers. Three mothers and three fathers were interviewed individually, as well as five parent couples were part of the first sample group of individuals. They had immigrated to Quebec at least one year ago, but no more than 6 years ago, originating from Argentina, Colombia, Venezuela, Peru, Egypt, Morocco, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Senegal, and Afghanistan. English speaking interpreters were engaged for three interviews. As far as childcare workers are concerned, 19 of the latter from eight daycare services have participated in this first compilation of data. They have between five and thirty years experience in the daycare field.

A total of 81 children aged two to five were evaluated by one or both parents and a senior childcare worker from the daycare service the child attends. However, two pairs of questionnaires were rejected. The analyses were therefore generated based on the remaining 158 questionnaires. To one section of the questionnaire dealing with the evaluation of the children by their parents another section was added concerning the latter's perception of their situation as immigrants, and a section on socio-demographic data.

The compilation of information was completed May 2007.

Results

Within the framework of the first phase, data were collected concerning the reasons for which the parents register their child in a childcare centre, the concerns they may have in that regard and, notably, regarding the problems of communication due to linguistic barriers. On that subject, **the results show that the transmission of information takes place from the childcare worker to the parents.** With regard to cultural differences, there are **differences between the views of the parents and those of the childcare worker, under certain circumstances.**

On the other hand, from the results obtained within the framework of the second phase, it was possible to determine that **the following factors seem to play a role in the development of the child:**

- the level of the parents' education;
- their level of integration;
- the fact that they do, or do not speak the language of the host society.

In fact, **the better the parents are educated, the more they feel integrated.** So that **the better they speak French, the less there exist potential developmental problems with the children, especially on cognitive and socio-affective levels.**

Furthermore, the data gathered relative to the situation of immigrant parents having taken part in the research, divulges that the **main factors that have contributed to the integration,** are the following:

- feeling secure (57%);
- registering one's children in a daycare service or a school (49.4%);
- being employed (41.8 %).

In addition, **financial problems (57%), nonrecognition of foreign diplomas (57%), and work experience outside of Canada (49%) were identified as being major obstacles to integration.**

Follow-up with concrete actions

In spite of the limits to generalize the results, they will act as stepping stones for the development of future research with a view to understanding the migratory experience and the potential impact of immigration on pre-school children. Moreover, five strategies were developed by a think-tank committee that has studied the research results. Their objective is to facilitate the inclusion of the families in order to encourage the development and well being of the children.

They are summarized as follows:

- a regional resource guide for immigrant families;
- an information and integration guide for parents whose children are, or will soon be registered in a daycare service;
- a list of training courses for the parents;
- a list of training courses for the childcare workers in childcare centres;
- an analysis of the needs of the caregivers.

To order copies of the research report or to obtain more information, contact us:

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