

“Things are different here, where do I go for help?”

**Immigrant Women in Kingston:
A Study of Settlement Services and the Needs of
Immigrant Women**

By

Tamiza Merali
BA (Hons), University of British Columbia, 1999

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the past several years, immigration to Canada has been increasing and, consequently, so has the female immigrant population. Immigrant women often face barriers in settling to life in Canada, and are considered a marginalized and disadvantaged segment of the Canadian population primarily due to their gender, race and immigrant status. Therefore, there is a need for services and programs to assist immigrant women with the settlement process. Immigrant women and previous research have identified that existing services and programs often do not address their needs and concerns.

Since immigrants tend to settle primarily in larger cities such as Toronto, Montréal and Vancouver, and research in the past has focused on these cities, Kingston was selected as a focus for this particular research. The city attracts immigrants and also provides services and programs related to the settlement of newcomers. Since extensive research about settlement related services, and specifically services for immigrant women, has not been conducted in the past, this research aims to answer the following research question:

What settlement-related services and programs are currently available to immigrant women in the City of Kingston and do these services meet the needs of the users?

A focus group discussion with immigrant women as well as interviews with key informants from service providers revealed the key barriers immigrant women faced in settlement. Language, specifically the inability to communicate in English, was the primary barrier faced by immigrant women followed by difficulty in finding employment, feelings of isolation and experiences of discrimination and racism. These barriers were consistent with those experienced by immigrant women in previous research in other Canadian cities.

A list of settlement-related programs and services available in Kingston, developed by an initial review of services listed in the local *Where to Turn Community Services Directory* (2000) and interviews with key informants, included: The Kingston and District Immigrant Services (KDIS), a number of English as a Second Language (ESL) Programs, The Queen's International Centre and The Kingston Community Counselling Centre. The Multicultural Women's program offered by KDIS, is the only program in Kingston that exists specifically for immigrant women. All other services are open to immigrants, visitors, students and the general public. Both immigrant women and service providers found these services accessible in terms of cost, transportation and child care. Most of these services are free to immigrant women and they provide bus tickets for transportation as well as child care. In addition, these services are culturally sensitive and in most cases are multilingual, or interpretation is available when necessary, thereby making them accessible to immigrants, and in particular immigrant women.

The gaps in services and program delivery identified by service providers were the need for more specialized services for immigrant women, increased funding in order to deliver such programs and services, outreach activities to reach isolated immigrant women and more collaboration among various service providers. Immigrant women identified the need for better information sources about available services and support groups organized by immigrant women themselves. Other needs include better employment-related services, assistance with accreditation and the need for mainstream services to be more accessible in terms of cross cultural sensitivity and multilingual/multicultural staff.

From the research it is evident that service providers must take initiatives to address the needs and gaps in their service and program delivery. The recommendations focus on how these needs may be addressed, as follows:

- Publish a directory of settlement services to address the information gap identified by immigrant women
- Coordination between service providers to improve services and share resources
- Organizing support groups by immigrant women to provide a familiar network to newcomers
- Enhance language and employment services to address the two key barriers faced by immigrant women in settlement
- Include client input in planning processes to ensure that services address client needs
- Expand outreach activities to reach most isolated immigrant women
- Provide culturally sensitive and multilingual services to make services more accessible to immigrant women
- Increased funding for services and programs for immigrant women
- Engage in anti-racism and discrimination activities to promote cross-cultural sensitivity

In conclusion, settlement is a life-long process and the provision of programs and services can only assist immigrant women in adapting to life in Canada to some extent. Immigrant women must also take a proactive role in changing their lives and empowering themselves, through community development, for example, thereby facilitating their long-term integration in our society.