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Canada's Immigrant Families: Growth, Diversity and Challenges

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Canada's Immigrant Families: Growth, Diversity and Challenges

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**CANADA'S IMMIGRANT FAMILIES:
GROWTH, DIVERSITY, AND CHALLENGES***

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ABSTRACT

As immigration continues to be the main factor in Canada's recent population growth, the number and proportion of Canada's immigrant families have also increased, to almost one-fifth of all families in Canada by 2006. We begin with a comparison of immigrant families with non-immigrant families on several sociodemographic characteristics including family type and size and home language to show similarities and differences. Next, we highlight diversity of immigrant families along selected characteristics including place of birth, period of immigration, and socioeconomic characteristics such as education and employment. Finally, we identify some challenges for immigrant families and topics for future research, and conduct a more detailed analysis of low-income or poor immigrant families.

INTRODUCTION

Canada's immigrant or foreign-born population has grown rapidly in recent decades. The 1961 census reported 1.6 million foreign-born residents, representing 10 percent of the population. By 2006, the immigrant population had increased to over 6 million, or 19.8 percent of the population. This is the highest percentage foreign-born since 1931.¹

As the immigrant population increases, so has the number and proportion of immigrant families in Canada. The definition of "immigrant family" can be quite broad. For example, an immigrant family can refer to any family that contains at least one foreign-born person, whether a child or adult. Another definition considers families with at least one immigrant parent as immigrant families (Hernandez et al. 2007).

In this paper, we define immigrant families using an approach that is consistent with previous research based on Canadian census data (Edmonston and Lee forthcoming; Haan 2005): immigrant families refer to family households where the primary household maintainer is foreign born, that is, an immigrant. We follow Statistics Canada's definition of family households to refer to households that contain at least one census family (that is, a married couple with or without children, or a couple living common-law with or without children, or a lone parent living with one or more children). This means that non-family households and family households where the primary household maintainer is Canadian-born but which may contain one or more foreign-born persons are excluded. It also means that we include family households where the primary household maintainer is foreign born but where one or more household members may be Canadian-born. While our approach may miss some families that contain immigrants, it may also include families that contain one or more Canadian-born members.

¹ Statistics on the foreign-born or immigrant population from various censuses can be found on Statistics Canada's website (www.statcan.gc.ca). Statistics Canada also issues specific reports on the foreign born population (see Canadian Social Trends) and projections of the future diversity of the population (Statistics Canada 2010a).

The above discussion illustrates some of the complexities in defining something that is seemingly as straightforward as an “immigrant family”. The intrinsic generational aspect of families means that many immigrant families contain both immigrant and native-born members. Immigrants may give birth to children in Canada, and their Canadian-born children are part of a family that is considered an immigrant family because of their immigrant parents. In addition, for countries such as Canada where immigration has been continuing for many decades, marriages between immigrants and non-immigrants can also be common, adding a further twist to the challenges of defining and studying immigrant families. There is an extensive literature on cross-nativity intermarriage (see Lee and Edmonston 2005; Qian et al. 2001, for U.S.-based studies and Lee and Boyd 2008). Many of these studies show that cross-nativity intermarriage varies by gender and racial/ethnic group, which may further complicate the definition and counting of immigrant families.²

The conceptual and measurement challenges described above should not, however, discourage research on immigrant families. There are several important reasons for studying immigrant families, including the following two reasons. First, as we noted above and show in greater detail below, immigrant families are an increasing part of Canada’s families. Yet a review of the literature shows very little information or research on immigrant families.³ Within the field of demography, immigration researchers study migration and immigrants while family demographers study families, with typically little overlap between the two areas. Thus, the first

² For example, if immigrant women are more likely to marry a native-born partner, and men are more likely to be householders, then our definition of immigrant family would miss such families. Also, if individuals from some immigrant groups are more likely to intermarry with native-born persons than persons from other immigrant groups, and the native-born partner is more likely to be the householder, our definition would again miss these families. On the other hand, if the immigrant partner is more likely to be the householder, this family would be included.

³ The edited volume by Lansford et al. (2007) on immigrant families in the U.S. is one of the few exceptions. One chapter in this volume is written by a Canadian-based author who discusses Canadian-based research (Tyyska 2007).

objective of this paper is to fill this gap in the literature by providing a descriptive analysis of immigrant families in Canada.

Second, from a lifecourse perspective, there are many critical issues about immigrant families that need study, including (i) immigrant integration (particularly as immigrants arrive at different ages and age in Canada); (ii) the second generation, that is, Canadian-born children of immigrant parents and how they compare on socioeconomic achievement relative to their parents and to children in non-immigrant families; (iii) the acculturation and socialization of children in immigrant families and potential inter-generational differences and even conflict; (iv) elderly immigrants, including immigrants who arrive at older ages and immigrants who age in place in Canada; and (v) general wellbeing of immigrant families at different stages of the lifecourse (for example, union formation or dissolution, childbearing, retirement, and health at different stages in the life-cycle). In addition, Tyyska (2007) identified changing gender relations and transnationalism (Wong 2007) as important topics for study of immigrant families.

In this paper, we compare immigrant and non-immigrant families along several characteristics to identify similarities and differences and potential issues that may be particularly challenging for immigrant families. We also compare immigrant families along selected characteristics to highlight the diversity of immigrant families. Finally, we conduct additional analysis of low income among immigrant families to provide further discussion of some of the challenges facing immigrant families.

GROWTH OF IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

- Table 1 About Here -

Between 1991 and 2006, the foreign-born population increased from 16.1 percent to 19.8 percent of the total population (see Table 1). That almost one in five Canadian residents is

foreign-born in 2006 is a record high since 1931. Immigration continues to be the main factor in Canada's population growth, accounting for 69 percent of population growth between 2001 and 2006 (Canadian Social Trends).

Not surprisingly, the proportion of immigrant families has also increased along with the growth of the immigrant population, growing from 21.7 percent in 1991 to 24 percent in 2006 (see Table 1).

COMPARING IMMIGRANT AND NON-IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

We compare immigrant families with non-immigrant families to identify similarities and differences. We base the comparisons of individual characteristics such as age, gender, education, and employment on characteristics of the householder, that is, the primary household maintainer.

- Table 2 About Here -

Table 2 compares family household type for Canadian-born and immigrant families. Most family households consist of one family with one couple (married or living common-law), with or without children. However, a slightly lower percentage of immigrant families are in this category. We note that the percentage of lone parent families has increased among Canadian-born families from 12.6 percent in 1991 to 15 percent in 2006. This type of family has also increased among immigrant families, but the percent remains lower, at 13.2 percent in 2006.

The largest difference in family type is in the higher percentage of immigrant families that contain multiple families. While the percentage of multiple family households among Canadian-born family households had increased from 0.9 percent in 1991 to 1.6 percent in 2006, these levels are much lower than those among immigrant families. In 1991, 3.8 percent of

immigrant families contain multiple families, a percentage that steadily increased to 5.7 percent by 2006.⁴

We examine 2006 census data in the remaining comparisons of immigrant and non-immigrant families shown in Table 3.

- Table 3 About Here -

Mean household size is 3.4 for immigrant families versus 3.0 for non-immigrant families, which is consistent with the higher percentage of multiple family households among immigrant families shown in Table 2 earlier. Immigrant family householders are older, with a mean age of 52.1 compared with 48.8 for Canadian-born householders. A higher percentage of immigrant householders are male (74.6 percent) compared with 67.4 percent male for Canadian-born householders.

Immigrant families have lower mean total family income, at \$74,386, compared with mean total family income of \$80,229 for Canadian-born families. A higher percentage of immigrant families (18.6 percent) also fall into Statistics Canada's definition of low income, compared with 9.2 percent of Canadian-born families, meaning that twice as many immigrant families are low income or poor when compared with non-immigrant families.⁵

Immigrant householders are less likely to own their homes compared with Canadian-born householders (74.8 percent compared with 79 percent).

⁴ The higher percentage of immigrant families that include multiple families has at least two implications. First, immigrant family households are more likely to be larger (more people sharing a household unit). Second, our definition of immigrant family may underestimate the number and proportion of immigrant families.

⁵ "The low income cut-offs (LICOs) are income thresholds below which a family will likely devote a larger share of its income on the necessities of food, shelter, and clothing than the average family. The approach is essentially to estimate an income threshold at which families are expected to spend 20 percentage points more than the average family on food, shelter, and clothing.... Statistics Canada's cut-offs ... vary by 7 family sizes and 5 different populations of the area of residence" (Statistics Canada 2010b: 7). For example, the LICO (after tax) for a family of 4 residing in an urban area with population 100,000 to 499,999 was \$27,550 in 2005 (Statistics Canada 2010b: Table 1).

Marital status breakdowns are fairly similar except for a slightly lower percentage that is single and slightly higher percentage that is widowed among immigrant householders (both reflecting the higher mean age described earlier).

Immigrant householders have slightly higher mean years of schooling compared with Canadian-born householders --13.4 versus 12.98 years of schooling. In comparing categories of highest level of education attained, higher percentages of immigrant householders have achieved a Bachelor's degree (18.8 percent compared with 14 percent of Canadian-born householders) and post-Bachelor's degree or professional degrees (10.2 percent versus 4.9 percent).

There are three indicators for comparing labor force characteristics – labor force status, self-employment, and broad occupational categories. A higher percentage of Canadian-born householders are employed (72.4 percent) compared with 66.8 percent employed among immigrant householders. The percent unemployed is similar at 3.2 or 3.3 percent. The gap in percent employed is attributable to the higher percentage of immigrant householders who are not in the labor force (29.9 percent) compared with 24.3 percent of Canadian-born householders who are not in the labor force. Among those who are employed, slightly more immigrants are self-employed (17 percent) compared with 14.3 percent of Canadian-born householders.

We grouped occupation of employed householders into three categories – managerial/professional, intermediate skill clerical/sales/services, and semi- and low-skill clerical/sales/services – to provide a general overview of occupational attainment. A higher percentage of immigrant householders (33.6 percent compared with 30.6 percent of Canadian-born householders) have managerial or professional jobs. Half of Canadian-born householders are employed in occupations in the intermediate category compared with 43 percent of

immigrant householders. Lastly, more immigrant householders have low or semi-skilled jobs (23.4 percent) compared with 19.4 percent of Canadian-born householders.

The last part of Table 3 compares home language of immigrant and non-immigrant families. Not surprisingly, immigrant families are more likely to have a non-official language as their home language, and show greater diversity in languages spoken at home. While English and French account for over 96 percent of Canadian-born families' home language, the most often spoken home languages among immigrant families are, in rank order, English (47.3 percent), Other European language (16.4 percent), Chinese (11.4 percent), and South Asian languages (8.4 percent).

DIVERSITY OF IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

In this section, we focus on immigrant families and examine 2006 census microdata to highlight the diversity of immigrant families along several characteristics. We begin with place of birth and ethnic origin of immigrant families, as reported for the householder (that is, the primary household maintainer as previously described).

- Table 4 About Here -

The largest group of immigrant householders (over one-fourth) was born in Europe. Adding the 8.5 percent who were born in the United Kingdom, 34.1 percent of immigrant families trace their origins to Europe. South Asia (including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and other countries in the Indian sub-continent) was the area of birth for 12.9 percent of immigrant householders, followed by China (including Hong Kong) with 12.1 percent. Adding the 5.2 percent from the Philippines and 8.0 percent from other East and Southeast Asia, 38.3 percent of immigrant families originated in Asia (excluding the Middle East and West Asia).

The next notable place of birth for immigrant families is Latin America and the Caribbean, with 11.4 percent, the Middle East/West Asia with 6.1 percent, and Africa with 5.7 percent.

The diverse geographical origins of immigrant families are also reflected in ethnic origins. We show ethnic origins because place of birth and ethnic origins do not overlap completely and ethnic origin is conceptually more indicative of ethnocultural diversity and ancestry.⁶ If we look at the single ethnic origin groups in Table 4, we see that the most common ethnic origins reported are, in order, Other European ethnic origin (22.9 percent), Chinese (15.6 percent), South Asian (14.2 percent), British (6.3 percent), Arab/West Asian (6.2 percent), Caribbean/Black (5.7 percent), Filipino (4.2 percent), and Latin American (2.4 percent).

Lastly, Table 4 shows immigrant householders' reported knowledge of Canada's official languages. The majority knows English (78 percent), another 3.8 percent know French, and 11.3 percent know both official languages. However, 6.9 percent do not know either English or French.

Some of Canada's immigrants have been in Canada for many decades while others are relatively recent arrivals. Period of immigration and by implication, duration of residence are important characteristics of immigrants as they are related to place of origin and integration experiences. Table 5 compares immigrant householders by year of arrival and duration of residence.

- Table 5 About Here -

The share of immigrant householders who immigrated before 1950 is less than 2 percent and 8.8 percent for arrivals in the 1950s. The low percentages reflect the effects of mortality (and other factors including return migration) on immigrants who had arrived four or five

⁶ Consider the following hypothetical immigrants born in Africa: an immigrant born in South Africa of English ethnic origin is more similar to an immigrant born in England of English ethnic origin than to another immigrant born in South Africa of Zulu ethnic origin, or an immigrant born in Uganda of South Asian ethnic origin.

decades ago. Most immigrant householders arrived either in the 1990s (27.6 percent) or from 2000 on (22 percent). The next set of numbers on duration of residence in Canada reflects the distribution by year of arrival. Over 30 percent of immigrant householders have been in Canada less than 10 years, and another 25.5 percent from 10 to 19 years. Taken together, well over half of immigrant householders have been in Canada less than twenty years. The last line in Table 5 shows that almost three-fourths of immigrant householders are naturalized Canadian citizens.

We briefly describe other characteristics of immigrant families not shown in tables. Immigrant families overwhelmingly reside in metropolitan areas (90.9 percent). Over half (56.2 percent) of immigrant families reside in Ontario, with another 18.3 percent in British Columbia, and 13.3 percent in Quebec.

CHALLENGES

The descriptive analyses suggest that, for the most part, immigrant families do not markedly differ from non-immigrant families. However, there are some differences that may pose potential challenge for immigrant families. We identify three that could be particularly challenging for immigrant families.

First, the 18.6 percent of immigrant families that are low income or poor is more than double the percent of low-income Canadian-born families. Low family income has many repercussions for family well-being, including housing quality, nutrition and health, and resources to help children in schooling and other areas of development. Some studies show that poverty is the single most important factor for a range of negative outcomes for children (Hernandez et al. 2007). Second, the higher percent of immigrant householders who are in low and semi-skilled occupations -- over 23 percent compared with 19.4 percent of Canadian-born householders, which, while not a large gap, is of potential concern given the generally higher

educational attainment of immigrants. Working in lower skilled occupations is obviously related to low income. Third, almost 7 percent of immigrant householders do not know either one of Canada's official languages. While this is not a large percentage, still, not knowing either English or French can only represent problems when it comes to communication, interacting with the community for services including health care, and in job searches if the immigrant is looking for work.

In additional analysis, we focus on factors associated with low income among immigrant families, given the central role of adequate income for overall family well-being.

Logistic Regression of Low-Income Immigrant Families

We estimate a model predicting low income for immigrant families using 2006 census data. The outcome, low income, is a binary variable, coded 0 if not low income and 1 if low income. We include the following variables in the model, based on previous research on factors associated with low income among families and immigrant families (see for example, Lee 1994; Picot et al. 2008; Seccombe 2000). We grouped many of these variables to reduce the number of categories. While this may result in loss of some potentially interesting details, we decided that brevity is preferred given the exploratory objectives of this paper. The reference category for categorical variables is indicated in the table reporting results.

Age: Income often increases with age as individuals gain work experience and seniority (therefore, a conventional human capital factor). However, after a certain age, income may decrease, as earnings of older workers flatten or decrease with reduced hours of work or when older individuals retire and leave the labor force.

Gender: Males are expected to have higher income because of persistent gender gaps in earnings and other economic assets, although we do not know if this is the case among immigrants.

Marital Status: It is a well-documented research finding that married people (and perhaps persons living common-law) are generally better off than others (Seccombe 2000). The explanations are complex but usually refer to selectivity factors and perhaps two-earner families. Other categories of marital status are separated or divorced; single; and widowed.

Education: This is a key human capital variable that usually affects income positively. We have three categories of education: less than high school; high school or high school plus some additional education; and Bachelor's degree or Bachelor's degree plus more.

Home Language: We include home language as a proxy for the degree of linguistic integration of immigrant families and knowledge or proficiency of official languages. This is a binary variable, 0=English or French or both, and 1=some other language.

Citizenship: Immigrants who acquire citizenship may do for many reasons and we do not have data to examine this. However, we consider immigrants who have become naturalized Canadian citizens to be more integrated and possibly more successful (see for example Edmonston and Lee's forthcoming paper on homeownership), and to have been in Canada long enough to qualify and apply for citizenship. Having Canadian citizenship may also help in employment and therefore income. This is also binary variable.

Age-at-immigration: This variable has been shown to be quite important for immigrant integration and achievement (Lee and Edmonston 2011; Myers et al 2009). Immigrants who arrived at younger ages are more likely to achieve higher levels of education, income, and occupation. There are five categories for age-at-immigration: 0-12 years, 13-19, 20-29, 30-49, and 50 years and older.

Place of birth: Finally, we include place of birth as a proxy for many factors, including affinity with Canadian institutions and society (for example, immigrants born in the U.S. can be expected

to have higher affinity than immigrants born in Afghanistan), language and cultural similarities, ease of transferability of educational credentials and/or labor market experience, and other factors. There are eleven categories for place of birth as shown in Table 6.

- Table 6 About Here -

The results from the logistic regression are shown in Table 6. The model has an overall 82.3 percent predicted correctly, and a Cox and Snell R^2 of 0.110. The last column in Table 6 shows the odds ratio computed by taking the exponential of the logistic regression coefficient (B) for the variable, shown in the second column of the table.

Age has a negative effect on low-income status, meaning the odds of being poor are reduced with increasing age: with each increase in age by a year, the odds of being in a low-income immigrant family are reduced by 0.03 (1 minus 0.97).

Compared to the reference category of female, male immigrants are less likely to be in low-income families. However, the gender difference is not statistically significant.

Home language has a large effect on low-income status. Compared to immigrant families where the home language is one or both of Canada's official languages, immigrant families with home languages other than the official languages are 1.5 times more likely to be low-income.

Whether the immigrant family's householder is a naturalized citizen has similarly large effects: naturalized citizenship reduces the odds of being low-income by half.

Age at immigration has noticeably large effects on low-income status. Compared to the reference category (immigrants who arrived as young children aged 0 to 12), the odds of being in a low-income immigrant family increases with age at immigration – by 1.3 times for immigrants who arrived as teenagers, by 1.5 times for immigrants who arrived in their 20s, by 2.7 times for

those who arrived as adults between 30 and 49, and by 3.7 times for immigrants who arrived aged 50 and older.

The human capital characteristic of education shows expected and large effects. Compared with immigrants with less than high school education, immigrants with high school or high school plus some additional education have odds that are lower by 0.16 to be in a low-income family, and the odds of immigrants with a Bachelor's degree or Bachelor's degree plus additional education being in a low-income family are lower by 0.38.

The effects of marital status are also as expected. Compared with the reference category (married or common-law couple), immigrants who are separated or divorced are 2.4 times more likely to be in a low-income family; single immigrants are 1.3 times more likely to be in low-income family; and widowed immigrants are 1.2 times more likely to be in low-income family.

Place of birth reveals interesting and, for some groups, substantial effects. Some differences are not statistically significant. Compared to the reference category (place of birth is the United States), immigrants born in the United Kingdom, the Philippines, and "other" countries (mainly Oceania) are slightly less likely to be in a low-income family, but the differences are small and not statistically significant. The largest effect for place of birth is for immigrants born in the Middle East or West Asia, who are 3.5 times more likely than immigrants born in the U.S. to be in a low-income family. Immigrants born in "Other East/Southeast Asia" (including Vietnam and Cambodia) and Africa are about 2.8 times more likely to be in a low-income family. Immigrants born in China also face higher likelihood of being in low-income families, being 2.5 times more likely than U.S.-born immigrants.

Other groups of immigrants have lower likelihood of being in low-income families compared to immigrants born in the above countries, but are still at greater risk, compared with

immigrants born in the U.S. Immigrants born in Latin America or the Caribbean are 1.8 times more likely to be in a low-income family, immigrants born in South Asia are 1.7 times more likely to be in a low-income family, and immigrants born in “Other European” countries are 1.3 times more likely to be in a low-income family.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This paper provides an exploratory descriptive analysis of immigrant families in Canada. In spite of the important role of immigration in Canada’s history and recent population growth, information and research on Canada’s immigrant families is relatively sparse. This paper contributes new information about immigrant families, one of the fastest growing types of families in Canada. We document recent trends that show a steady increase in the number and proportion of immigrant families in Canada, compare immigrant and non-immigrant families on several key sociodemographic characteristics, provide a more detailed examination of immigrant families to highlight the diversity of these families, identify some areas of concern and challenge for immigrant families, and conclude with a further study of one of these areas of concern – the higher incidence of low income among immigrant families.

For the most part, immigrant families do not differ from non-immigrant families. Most consist of a couple (married or living common-law) with or without children in the household. There are fewer lone parent immigrant families compared with non-immigrant families, suggesting that divorce or non-marital family formation is less likely and acceptable among immigrants. However, immigrant family households are more likely to have multiple families. This latter difference means that immigrant family households tend to be larger, with more people sharing a housing unit. This could reflect immigrants’ preferences for living together with other relatives (which could, in turn, represent stronger familial ties and support) or a

strategy to reduce housing costs. One potential downside could be greater risk of overcrowding and lower housing quality.

Other differences include the concentration of immigrant families in metropolitan areas (over 90 percent of immigrant families live in metropolitan areas) and in the provinces of Ontario (with over 56 percent of immigrant families), British Columbia (18 percent), and Quebec (13 percent). It is well known that immigrants are attracted to Canada's largest cities (Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal) for many reasons, including job opportunities, diversity of cities, existing social networks, greater amenities, and so forth, thus the metropolitan and geographical concentration is not surprising. Immigrant families add to the diversity and appeal of these areas for new immigrants, and we can expect that these three cities and provinces will continue to be the main destinations and place of residence for future immigrant families.

Given the geographical and ethnocultural diversity of immigrants, it is not surprising that the ethnic origins and home language of immigrant families differ from that of non-immigrant families. Immigrant families speak a variety of languages at home, including other European languages, Chinese, and South Asian languages, although almost half speak English as their home language. Linguistic diversity can be a bonus or a handicap. On the positive side, facility in more than one language is always good, facilitating communication with other speakers of the language, and more importantly, communication across generations within immigrant families, where immigrant parents or grandparents may not speak or are not proficient in Canada's official languages. On the negative side, maintaining a home language that is different from English or French may hamper immigrants or their children's integration into Canadian society.

On several socioeconomic indicators, immigrant families do not compare favorably with non-immigrant families. For example, immigrant household mean incomes are lower by almost

\$6,000, the percentage of families that are considered low income is twice as high among immigrant families, a higher percentage are working in low and semi-skilled jobs, and a slightly lower percentage of immigrant families own their homes. These differences represent challenges for immigrant families as they reflect possible poorer opportunities and outcomes in the labor market and socioeconomic resources. If immigrant families are more likely to struggle socioeconomically, then researchers need to study why and identify potential ways to improve the chances for better outcomes. The less favorable socioeconomic situation of immigrant families also contains implications for the welfare of children in such families.

However, immigrant householders have educational attainment that compare favorably with their non-immigrant counterparts: for example, almost 30 percent have a Bachelor's degree or higher education, compared with about 20 percent among non-immigrants. The apparent paradox of highly educated immigrant householders and poorer socioeconomic outcomes has been observed and reported by others (Picot et al. 2008). Possible reasons for the inconsistency include lack of transferability of immigrants' educational credentials to the Canadian labor market, lack of Canadian work experience, and employers' preferences.

Immigrant families are not a homogenous category and are diverse along many characteristics based on the householder, including place of birth, ethnic origins, period of arrival in Canada and duration of residence in Canada. Canada has been appropriately described as a nation of continuous immigration. However, the origins of immigrants have changed remarkably in recent decades from a dominance of migration flows from the British Isles, and other parts of Europe, to Asia (dominated by China and South Asia). While public attention has focused on the growing immigrant population from Asia and other non-European countries, it bears reminding that over 34 percent of immigrants originate from the United Kingdom and Europe, compared

with 12 percent from China and 13 percent from South Asia. As mortality reduces the older cohorts of immigrants, the percent and social importance of more recent immigrants from Asia and Latin America and their families will increase. Immigrant families can be expected to become even more diverse than we have reported in this paper.

Finally, from a more detailed analysis of the risk of low income, one of the areas of concern or challenge that we had identified for immigrant families, we are able to examine several factors that can be called risk factors for low income among immigrant families. One short hand way to interpret the results is that the immigrant family at *greatest* risk of being poor is one where the householder immigrated at age 50 or older, has less than a high school education, is divorced or separated, is not a naturalized citizen, speaks a home language that is neither English nor French, and is born in the Middle East or West Asia. The effect of education confirms the importance of human capital in socioeconomic wellbeing. Divorce and separation are known to be associated with reduced economic resources for families as the income from a partner are no longer available.

The remaining factors are unique to immigrants. First is the important effect of age at immigration, shown by previous research to be a key factor in individual immigrant outcomes, and now we also show that it is highly important for immigrant families' economic wellbeing. Younger the age at immigration implies more extensive Canadian experience with education, social networks, institutions and labor market, which can help immigrants and their families.

Second, not having Canadian citizenship could directly limit economic opportunities but can also reflect shorter duration of residence and lack of experience in Canada that can also limit economic options. Third, we had previously discussed the potential positive and negative role of

a non-official language home language. The multivariate analysis of low income demonstrates that a non-official language home language increases the risk of being low income or poor.

Finally, place of birth matters a lot for some immigrants and their families. The substantially increased risk of being poor associated with place of birth in the Middle East/West Asia, other East/Southeast Asia, Africa, and China reinforces the need to understand what these place of birth effects are measuring. Since the effects of other factors such as age and education are accounted for in the model, the large place of birth effects require further research to try and explain them. As more of Canada's immigrant families trace their origins to these countries, the heightened risk of low income or poverty for growing numbers and percentages of immigrant families can only be of great research and public concern.

While we have provided a descriptive overview of immigrant families in Canada and identified some issues that are of particular concern for immigrant families, much remains to be done. We hope this paper serves as a starting point for needed research on a wide range of topics about immigrant families in Canada.

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Table 1: Percent Foreign-Born Population and Immigrant Families, 1991 to 2006

Year	Percent Foreign-Born	Total Population (N)	Percent Immigrant Families	Total Family Households (N)
1991	16.1	27,296,856	21.7	218,682
1996	17.4	28,846,761	22.7	214,298
2001	18.4	30,007,094	23.7	220,637
2006	19.8	31,612,897	24.0	229,471

Source: Statistics Canada for population numbers and percent foreign-born. Authors' analysis of microdata from the 1991, 1996, 2001, and 2006 censuses for data on immigrant families and family households. See text for definition of immigrant family.

Table 2: Family Household Type for Canadian-born and Immigrant Families, 1991 to 2006 (in percent)

Family Household Type	1991		1996		2001		2006	
	Canadian-born	Immigrant	Canadian-born	Immigrant	Canadian-born	Immigrant	Canadian-born	Immigrant
1 family, couple	86.5	84.8	84.8	81.9	83.7	80.3	83.5	81.1
1 family, lone parent	12.6	11.4	14.1	13.2	14.7	14.0	15.0	13.2
Multiple family	0.9	3.8	1.1	4.9	1.5	5.6	1.6	5.7
Total number of families	171,183	47,499	165,743	48,555	168,264	52,373	174,451	55,020

Source: Authors' analysis of 1991, 1996, 2001, and 2006 census microdata.

Table 3: Selected Characteristics of Canadian-born and Immigrant Families, 2006

Characteristic	Canadian-born	Immigrant
Mean Household Size	3.0	3.4
Mean Age	48.8	52.1
Percent Male	67.4	74.6
Mean Total Family Income (\$)	80,229	74,386
Percent Low Income Status	9.2	18.6
Percent Homeowner	79.0	74.8
Marital Status (%)		
Married/Living Common-Law	84.4	85.8
Separated/Divorced	7.7	7.2
Widowed	2.7	3.8
Single	5.1	3.2
Mean Years of Schooling	12.8	13.4
Highest Education Attained (%)		
Less than High School	19.2	18.2
High School	22.9	18.9
Post-High School, Less than University	39.1	34.0
Bachelor's Degree	14.0	18.8
Post-Bachelor and Professional	4.9	10.2
Labor Force Status (%)		
Employed	72.4	66.8
Unemployed	3.2	3.3
Not in Labor Force	24.3	29.9
Percent Self-employed	14.3	17.0
Occupation (%)		
Manager/Professional	30.6	33.6
Intermediate Clerical, Sales, Services	50.0	43.0
Semi-and low skilled Manual/Sales/Services	19.4	23.4
Home Language (%)		
English	71.1	47.3
French	25.5	4.0
English and French	2.1	0.6
Other European	0.5	16.4
Aboriginal	0.5	0.0
Arabic/West Asian Language	0.0	2.0
Chinese	0.1	11.4
Filipino/Tagalog	0.0	2.3
Other East/Southeast Asian Language	0.0	2.2
South Asian Language	0.1	8.4
Other	0.1	5.4

Source: Authors' analysis of 2006 census microdata.

Table 4: Place of Birth, Ethnic Origins, and Knowledge of Official Language, 2006 (in percent)

Place of Birth		
	United States	3.9
	United Kingdom	8.5
	Other Europe	25.6
	Middle East/West Asia	6.1
	South Asia	12.9
	China	12.1
	Philippines	5.2
	Other East/Southeast Asia	8.0
	Africa	5.7
	Latin America/Caribbean	11.4
	Other	0.6
Ethnic Origin		
	Canadian	0.4
	British	6.3
	French	0.8
	Other European	22.9
	Aboriginal	0.0
	Arab/West Asian	6.2
	South Asian	14.2
	Chinese	15.6
	Filipino	4.2
	Korean	1.8
	Vietnamese	1.3
	Other East/Southeast Asian	1.0
	Latin American	2.4
	Caribbean/Black/African	5.7
	Other Single Origin	0.3
	Multiple Origins	17.1
Knowledge of Official Languages		
	English	78.0
	French	3.8
	Both English and French	11.3
	Neither English nor French	6.9

Source: As for Table 3.

Table 5: Year of Immigration and Citizenship of Immigrant Householders, 2006

	Percent
Year of Immigration	
Before 1950	1.8
1950-59	8.8
1960-69	10.9
1970-79	15.1
1980-89	13.7
1990-99	27.6
2000 and later	22.0
Duration of Residence in Canada	
0-9 years	30.1
10-19 years	25.5
20-29 years	14.8
30-39 years	15.4
40 or more years	14.2
Naturalized Canadian Citizen	74.8

Source: As for Table 4.

Table 6: Logistic Regression of Low Income Status, Immigrant Families, 2006

Variable	Regression Coefficient (B)	Standard Error	Significance ^a	Exp.(B)
Constant	-0.861	0.070	0.000	0.423
Age	-0.031	0.001	0.000	0.969
Gender (Ref.=Female)				
Male	<i>-0.027</i>	0.016	<i>0.093</i>	0.974
Marital Status (Ref.=Married/Common-law)				
Separated or Divorced	0.870	0.033	0.000	2.386
Single	0.246	0.027	0.000	1.279
Widowed	0.180	0.047	0.000	1.197
Education (Ref.=Less than High School)				
High School/Some Post-High School	-0.180	0.020	0.000	0.836
Bachelor's Degree or More	-0.473	0.024	0.000	0.623
Home Language (Ref.=English/French/Both)				
Other Language	0.418	0.019	0.000	1.519
Citizenship (Ref.=Not Canadian Citizen)				
Naturalized Canadian	-0.674	0.019	0.000	0.509
Age at Immigration (Ref.=0-12)				
13-19	0.275	0.031	0.000	1.317
20-29	0.399	0.029	0.000	1.490
30-49	0.977	0.031	0.000	2.657
50 and older	1.321	0.048	0.000	3.747
Place of Birth (Ref.=USA)				
United Kingdom	<i>-0.063</i>	0.072	<i>0.377</i>	0.939
Other Europe	0.285	0.061	0.000	1.329
Middle East/West Asia	1.264	0.065	0.000	3.541
South Asia	0.544	0.063	0.000	1.723
China/Hong Kong	0.901	0.063	0.000	2.462
Philippines	<i>-0.094</i>	0.071	<i>0.185</i>	0.910
Other East/Southeast Asia	1.025	0.064	0.000	2.787
Africa	1.017	0.065	0.000	2.765
Latin America/Caribbean	0.605	0.062	0.000	1.830
Other	<i>-0.861</i>	0.070	<i>0.768</i>	0.963
Model Summary				
	-2 log likelihood	105637.97		
	Cox and Snell R ²	=0.110		
	Nagelkerke R ²	=0.180		

^a All coefficients are significant at p<0.05 except those in italics.