

Mental Wellness with Family Beyond Borders: A Closer Look at Immigrants' Tools for Self Care Under COVID-19 Restrictions

Bharati Sethi, Jessica Cooper, Allison Williams, King's College, London, ON

CONTEXT

This project is part of a larger five-year study on Transnational Caregiving that explores the experiences of Indigenous, Visible Minority, and European Carer-Employees (CEs) in London and within Ontario. Transnational Carer-Employees (TCEs) are those who reside and work in Canada while simultaneously providing care to parents, adults living with a disability, and/or children who live in their home country. Transnational Caregiving may involve long-distance moral, emotional, financial and/or decision making support.

BACKGROUND

- Nearly 20 per cent of respondents to the London 2016 census reported being born outside Canada, with the largest numbers coming from Europe, Asia, the Middle East and Africa (Statistics Canada, 2021).
- Due to globalization and an aging population, many of these immigrants have become transnational caregivers separated by a country of origin and a country of employment.
- In 2012, more than one-quarter of all regular caregivers reported five or more out of a possible nine symptoms of psychological distress (Sharma, 2014).

OBJECTIVE

The aim of this project is to explore the experiences of European immigrants who identify as TCEs, are at least 18 years of age, and reside in London, Ontario, in the context of COVID-19.

METHODOLOGY

- Community-based participatory research and arts-based ethnography methodologies were used to engage participants in 60-90 minute virtual interviews
- Interviews were conducted in English
- Purposive and snowball sampling
- 5 participants (M=1; F=4)
- Countries of origin: Scotland, Germany, Greece and Croatia
- Participants were asked to submit an art piece that represented their transnational caregiving experience
- Thematic analysis was used to analyze the interview data and artwork

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

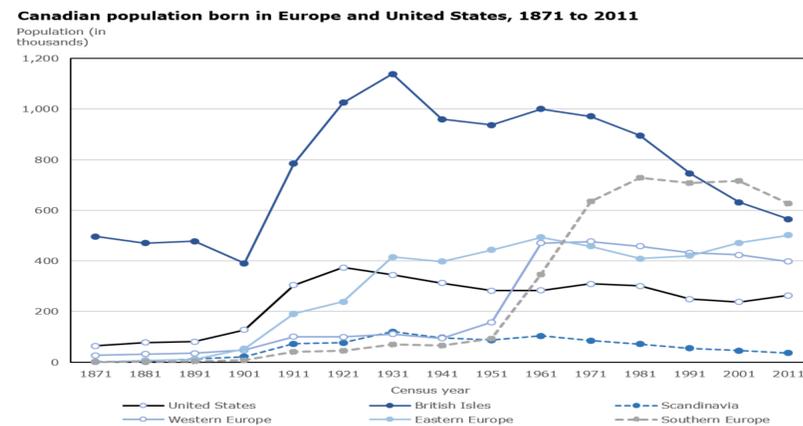
Preliminary thematic analysis revealed the following central themes:

- Impacts of COVID-19 Restrictions
 - Family emergencies were particularly mentally damaging
 - Importance of emotional supports and resources in the absence of direct physical contact for both caregivers and recipients
 - Increased sense of gratitude for family time during COVID-19
- Workplace Influence
 - Significance of employers providing time off to provide care
 - Feelings of a reciprocal relationship with employers
 - Small gestures by employers notably increased TCEs feelings of being appreciated
- Importance of Leisure
 - Self-care activities may transfer to coping mechanisms in times of emergency
 - The association of caregiving and grief highlights the risk of burnout and the need to care for oneself

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

- Analysis has illuminated the emotional turmoil linked to transnational caregiving practices and the exacerbation of these issues by COVID-19 restrictions.
- The data yielded from this study will provide better understanding as to how to best accommodate these Carer-Employees in the workplace, providing guidance to employers with respect to how to sustain these employees at work.
- Collaboration and cooperation between families, employers, community organizations, agencies and governments can help ensure that families and family members thrive while mitigating or eliminating the negative consequences of caregiving (Sharma, 2014).

PARTICIPANT COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN



Sources: Statistics Canada, censuses of population, 1871 to 2001. National Household Survey, 2011.

The graph above demonstrates the vast amount of individuals living in Canada who were born in Europe and thus may have family who remain abroad and require care.

REFERENCES

- Government of Canada, S. (2018, May 17). 150 years of immigration in Canada. Retrieved March, 2021, from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-630-x/11-630-x2016006-eng.htm>
 Government of Canada, S. (2021, February 08). Data products, 2016 Census. Retrieved March, 2021, from <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/index-eng.cfm>
 Sharma, A. (2014). Transnational caregiving: Family members in Canada caring across borders. *Transition: The Vanier Institute of Family*, 44(2), 13-14.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dr. Bharati Sethi, Associate Professor at King's College, Western University
 Dr. Allison Williams, Professor at McMaster University