

Transnational Carer-Employees in Canada: A Systematic Review of Literature

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Background

The past century has been marked with a rise in the world's migrant population and an increase in discussions about globalization and transnationalism (Bernhard et al., 2009; Tung, 2000). In 2017, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) admitted 22,253 caregivers as permanent residents into Canada (Government of Canada, 2019). Provision of family caregiving to parents is a deeply rooted tradition in many societies, particularly in Asian and African countries (Dhar, 2011a). This basic cultural practice has been affected by the phenomenon of international immigration to developed countries. The result of this migration trend is the formation of transnational families who are separated by a country of origin and a country of employment (Lahaie et al., 2009). As such, different dimensions and strategies of family caregiving are developed (Dhar, 2011a, 2011b), and new challenges and dilemmas are experienced by members of transnational families (Gui & Koropecjy-Cox, 2016; Baldassar et al. 2007). Therefore, although migration across national borders is not a new occurrence (Tung, 2000), the experience of global family care and the disruption of familial networks prompts researchers to study this phenomena.

Current Study

The primary research question guiding this study was:
What is the significance (economic, social, education, and health/well-being) of transnational caregiving in Canada, Australia and USA?

Transnational caregiving is defined as “the exchange of support and care across distance and national borders” (Baldassar et al. , 2007, p. 26). We wanted to understand the challenges that transnational Carer Employees (TCEs) face at a personal and systematic level when providing transnational caregiving to their ageing parents and children. TCEs are individuals providing unpaid, informal family care to family members and other significant people (i.e., parent, spouse or life partner, adult child, sibling and/or friend) living with debilitating physical, mental and/or cognitive conditions, while also working in paid employment” (Ireson et al., 2016, p. 1-2).

Methodology

The systematic review followed the following steps:

Phase 1: Identifying the research question

- What is the significance of transnational caregiving in Canada, Australia, and the USA?

Phase 2: Identifying relevant studies

- Search strings developed
- Records identified through Summon Search Tool and 13 databases (n=250 articles)

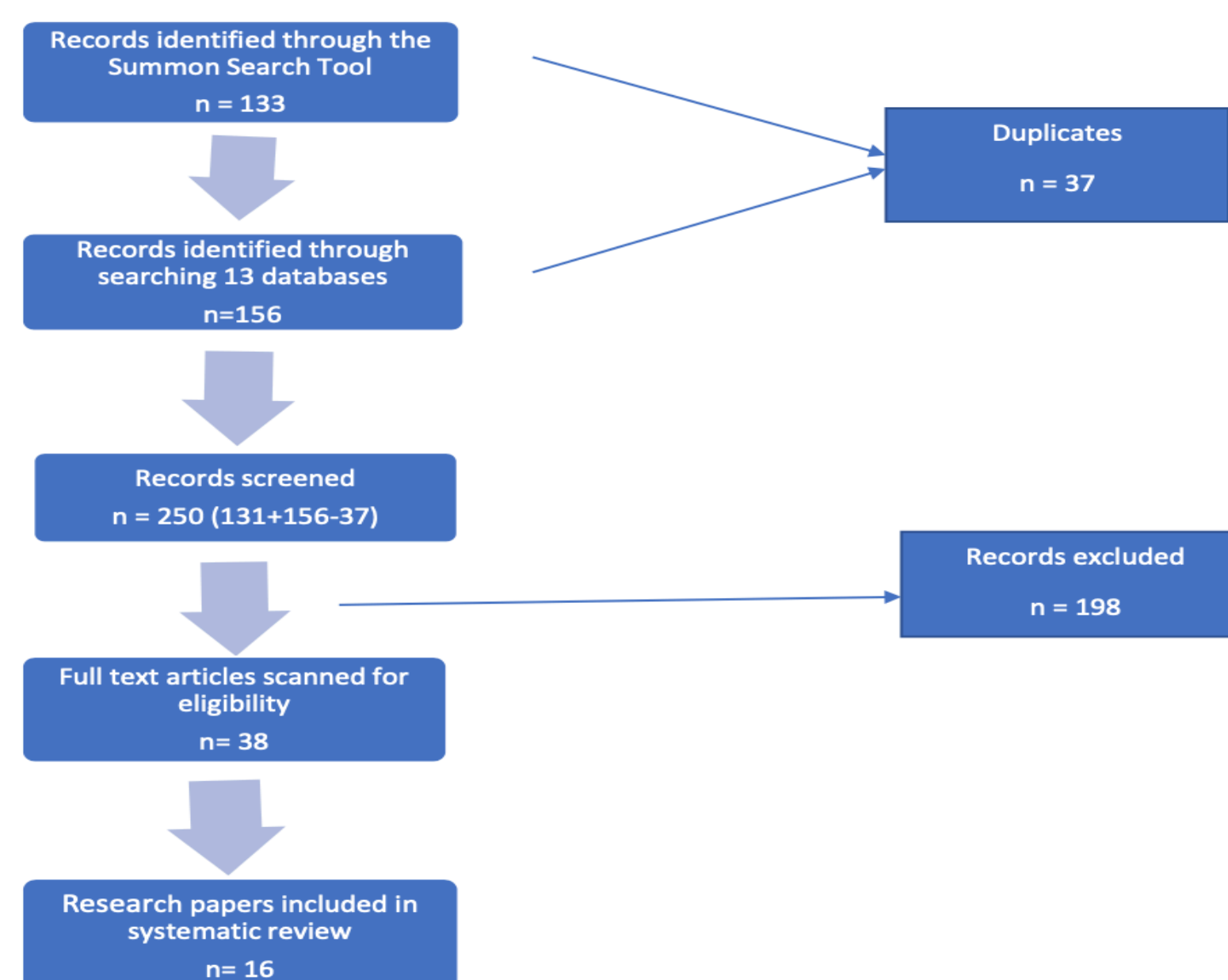
Phase 3: Study selection

- Inclusion & exclusion criteria applied to full text of articles (n=38 articles)
- 16 research papers included in systematic review

Phase 4: Collating, summarizing & reporting the results

- Qualitative thematic analysis reported
- Additional search of databases performed to fill gaps

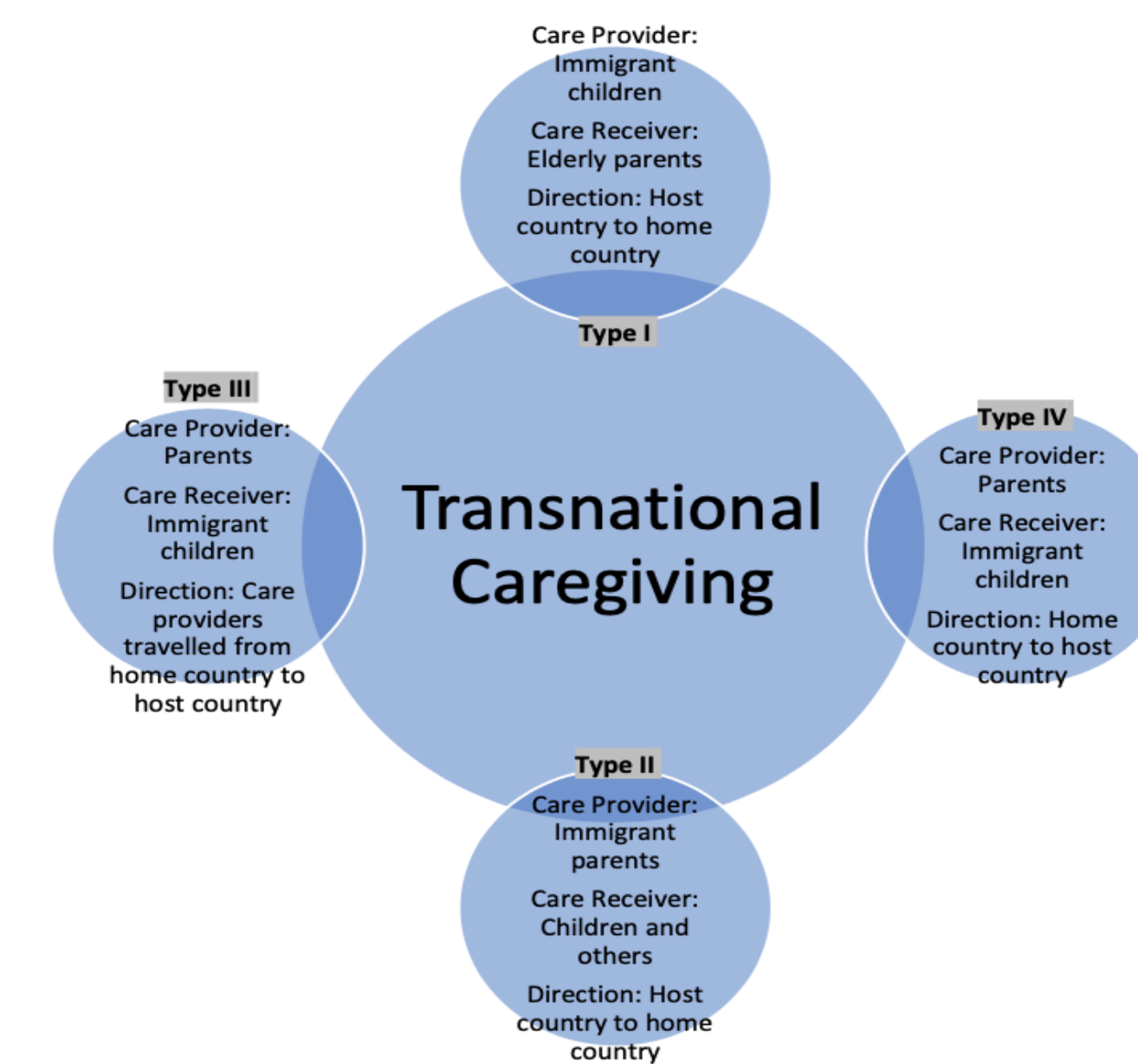
Research process for selecting scholarly research papers:



Findings

Thematic analysis revealed the following major themes:

Theme 1: Typologies and Multiple Forms of Transnational Caregiving



Theme 2: Negative Consequences of Transnational Caregiving

Geographical distance does not stop transnational families from providing care to parents, grandparents, and children in their home country, however, this experience “incurs psychological, emotional, and financial costs” (Lee et al., 2015, p. 328). A respondent in Amin and Ingman’s paper said, “At the age when they need us most, we are not near them. When we were growing up they were busy raising us. Now they have plenty of time but we are not around. They are missing the pleasure of raising grandkids and having some quality time with us. When I think about this I feel bad; I feel I made a selfish decision to migrate so far. I must help them in every possible way including helping them monetarily.” (p.320).

Theme 3: Positive Outcomes of Transnational Caregiving

Amin and Ingman (2014) state that “cultural normal regarding caregiving obligations...played as mediator by transforming the feelings of caregiving from a burden to that of a filial duty and rewarding experience” (p. 325). Ahmad (2016) shares the experience of being an immigrant daughter: “What sustained me through these difficult and often turbulent times was a lifetime of treasured memories of a father who gave me all that he had and all that he could. The times that I spent looking after my Dad were truly one of life’s greatest blessings for me.” (p. 6).

Discussion

The concept of transnational caregiving, its application, and personal, familial and policy level implications cannot be understood in its entirety without knowing the cultural, historical, spiritual, and social elements which play a major role in making transnational caregiving a normative obligation and actual practice. This process of cultural transformation, in which a good family values providing care to adult parents, translated into a ‘cultural burden’ in the host country; to a large extent, this translation seemed to be affected by Western culture and lifestyle.

It is important is to examine how immigrants in Canada are dealing with transnational caregiving realities; (1) in which they are compelled to compromise on such basic family, and (2) in which they are fighting/making sacrifices to keep alive the tradition of providing care at home under their own supervision. The most significant value of these new emerging dynamics is that it is creating space for studying immigrants’ lives and their relationships with host and home countries.

Conclusions

Our systematic review of the literature on TCEs in Canada confirms there is a shortage of research studies that focus on the experiences of Canadian immigrants providing care to their ageing parents residing in home countries. This indicates that this is a serious issue that is not being acknowledged in Canadian society at any level, even Canadian academia. It is not erroneous to assume that immigrant families in Canada also maintain ties to their home country by using various means and practices of transnational caregiving and, as a consequence, experience many emotional, psychological, and financial problems. Thus, it is imperative for Canadian scholars and policy makers to focus on transnational caregiving experiences of all immigrant communities.

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