

## To Stay or Not To Stay: Characteristics Associated With Newcomers Planning To Remain In Canada\*

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Every year Canada receives immigrants and refugees from all over the world. The absolute numbers may fluctuate; but it is generally understood that at its peak, annual immigration numbers represent about one percent of Canadian population (DeVoretz 1995). Ontario receives the highest number of immigrants when compared to the rest of Canada. In 1996 for example, about 53 percent of all immigrants to Canada settled in Ontario. The 1990s can be described as the decade of immigration, as the average number of immigrants per year has remained well over 200,000, the highest in Canadian history. The settlement and adaptation of these newcomers is of great interest to policy, practice, and research communities.

This paper attempts to describe the characteristics of those newcomers who plan to remain permanently in Canada, as opposed to those who are less sure or who definitely plan to leave. The article is divided into three sections. The first section provides an overview of immigration to Canada and relevant literature that explains immigrant settlement and adaptation. The second section summarizes the methods and findings related to long term plans of residency in Canada from a study on newcomers to Ontario. The final section provides a discussion

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of the findings and the implications for policy and practice.

### **Context of immigration in Canada**

According to the current immigration system there are two categories of admission to Canada: immigrant category and refugee category. Immigrant category consists of independent class, family class and the live-in-caregiver program. Refugee category consists of government-assisted refugees, privately-sponsored refugees and, refugees landed in Canada and their dependents abroad (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 1996). These categories and classes reflect the social, economic and humanitarian goals of the Canadian Immigration Policy (Ontario Ministry of Citizenship 1991). Independent immigrants are assessed on a point system, which reviews an applicant's eligibility on the basis of nine criteria including age, occupational demand, vocational preparation, arranged employment, location, education and relatives in Canada. During the last few years, due to a shift in policy directions, the independent class continues to grow as a proportion of overall immigration. By the year 2000, the independent class will form 53 percent, family class will form 44 percent and, 'other' will form 3 percent of total immigration (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 1996). Immigrants under the independent class are selected "based on their skills and their capacity to settle in, and contribute quickly to Canadian society and its economy" (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 1996: 7). Thus, it could be anticipated that rates of "successful adaptation" should be very high.

### **Globalization, immigrant settlement and adaptation**

It is important to examine the globalization of immigration. Castles (1997) point out nine contradictions in the context of globalization, especially as they relate to migration. Two of these contradictions seem to have bearing on this study: the contradiction between inclusion and exclusion, and the contradiction between the citizen as a national and as a global citizen. International migration is closely linked to the process of inclusion and exclusion. Individuals with skills and characteristics appropriate to global markets are included in the global order; whereas the same individuals may feel excluded from their own countries and at times from the host country itself "through economic disadvantage, denial of rights or discrimination" due to their immigrant status (Castles 1997). The other contradiction is that of the national and global citizen. There is an ambiguity in modern democratic citizenship: the ambiguity of civic belonging to a political community simultaneously with cultural belonging to a national community. The civic community is oblivious to differences in personal characteristics, whereas the national community depends on shared unique characteristics. The process

of nation formation has been problematic due to the resistance of cultures to de-emphasize their uniqueness. This problem is more acute in an era of migration. Some people hold dual citizenship, commute between countries and maintain socio-economic ties across borders. “The principle that each person should belong politically and culturally to just one nation-state is becoming unworkable” (Castles 1997).

The adaptation of new immigrants to the host country has been the subject of much research and theorizing from the early days of sociological research, starting with the Chicago school (Driedger 1996). The issue of immigrant adaptation has been the subject of both macro and micro level theories (Richmond 1994). Theories of assimilation and amalgamation assume that immigrants to a new country will completely identify with the dominant group of the host society. Theories of modified assimilation and modified pluralism suggest that ethnic minorities may retain their uniqueness in modified forms; while the theories of ethnic pluralism and ethnic conflict maintain that it is possible for ethnic minorities to preserve their identities in the host countries (Driedger 1996). All instances of immigrant adaptation can be seen from both collective and individual perspectives (Ward 1996). The collective perspective focuses almost exclusively on ethnicity or language as the basis for distinction between different ethnic groups. Individual adaptation, similar to ‘psychological acculturation’ is also an important area of investigation (Scott and Scott 1989; Berry and Laponce 1994). Comparative studies in Canada and Australia have suggested that while each of the theories explain particular aspects of immigrant adaptation, no single theory accounts for the whole process of immigrant adaptation (Richmond 1994).

The terms acculturation and adaptation are used somewhat interchangeably in most of the literature on immigration. Acculturation is “a process of adaptation and change whereby a person or an ethnic, social, religious, language or national group integrates with or adapts to the cultural values and patterns of the majority group” (Henry, Tator, Mattis, and Rees 1995). At an analytical level, however, adaptation is seen as the initial process of immigrant settlement, which may or may not lead to acculturation or integration. The criterion for successful adaptation is multi-faceted (Scott and Scott 1989). There are objective circumstances such as home ownership, gainful employment and subjective circumstances like satisfaction with life, friends, etc. The importance attached to these objective and subjective circumstances may vary according to individual and group dispositions (Scott and Scott 1989). At the same time it is important to recognize that the objective and subjective factors can only be separated for analytical purposes; in real life these factors interact and reinforce each other. Adaptation is also examined in terms of three components: subjective adaptation, socio-cultural adaptation, and economic status (Montgomery 1996).

Among the characteristics associated with settlement and adaptation, economic factors have received a great deal of attention (for example, DeVoretz 1995). Variables of age, family composition, socioeconomic level, education, culture, occupation, rural urban background, belief system, language, skills and

social networks are of great importance (Drachman and Halberstadt 1992). Shamsuddin (1995) emphasized the importance of age, education, language and skills. Nwadoria and McAdoo (1996) concluded that one of the major variables that assist acculturation of refugees in the USA is good communication skills in spoken English. Pendakur and Pendakur (1997) found that for immigrants, the benefits of knowing the official languages were different across Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs) in Canada, but knowing one official language was better than knowing none at all, and knowing both languages was better than knowing only one. The positive effects of social networks on settlement and adaptation have also received attention (Massey, Alarcon, Durand and Gonzalez 1987). Recently, however, Menjivar (1995) has argued that the assumption that established ethnic communities always provide support to new immigrants needs to be challenged. "Social networks are not automatically reproduced in an immigrant group" (p.11). Due to the absence of large scale longitudinal studies, most of the studies provide only partial understanding of the complex process of immigration. Context specific understanding of settlement and adaptation in different countries also need careful scrutiny.

As the above summary of literature shows, adaptation is a complex process, and there is no single definition or operationalization of adaptation. Permanent immigration is an enduring feature of Canadian policy and practice. Within this context, we are operationalizing successful adaptation as the intent to remain permanently in Canada. Immigrants who are dissatisfied with the settlement experience seriously contemplate leaving Canada. In our definition, these individuals would not be seen as adapting successfully. There are also some newcomers who arrive with the expectation that they will work in Canada, save money and return to their country of origin. From the point of view of Canadian immigration policy, these individuals are not seen as part of a successful adaptation process.

## Methods

The original sample consists of 248 newcomers (both landed immigrants and refugees) to Ontario, interviewed from March to June 1996 who met five distinct selection criteria:

- Permanent Residents or Canadian Citizens;
- In residence in Canada for a minimum of one year and a maximum of five years;
- Living in one of four locations at the time of the interview: Metropolitan Toronto, Ottawa, Windsor, or Thunder Bay;
- Between the ages of 18-65 years, and
- Able to speak English at the time of the interview.

The purposive sample of study participants was recruited from a number of sources including Citizenship offices and Canada Employment offices. (For a more detailed discussion of the methodology and sample, see Michalski and

George 1996). The main objective of the study was to seek information about the settlement of newcomers to Ontario. The study collected information on a whole range of topics related to pre-migration and settlement experiences.

Michalski and George's (1996) original report on the study gave further details about the sample. The participants came from 65 different source countries. Their average length of stay in Canada at the time of the interviews was 46.8 months. Almost all the respondents were either landed immigrants (44.7%), or Canadian citizens (52.9%). Participants identified 55 different first languages, the most common being English (17.3%), Cantonese (8.5%), Arabic (9.3%), Tamil (7.3%), Somali (5.6%) and Polish (4.0%) (Michalski and George 1996).

The purpose of this article is to explore the characteristics of those who plan to remain in Canada permanently versus those who are definitely planning to leave or are uncertain about their future plans regarding residency in Canada. The respondents were asked the following question: "Some immigrants plan to stay in Canada permanently. Others want to go to other countries eventually, or want to return home sometime in the future. What are your plans in this respect?" Two-thirds ( $n=166$ , 68.6%) planned to remain in Canada permanently. Forty-two respondents (17.4%) were uncertain about their future plans regarding residency in Canada, twenty-six (10.7%) planned to return to their home country, and eight (3.3%) respondents planned to move to another country. The latter three categories were recoded into one unsure/planning to leave category, resulting in a dichotomous new variable used in all subsequent analyses. Although this question only reflects the newcomers' attitudes, not whether they actually do leave the country or not, we felt the desire to leave and/or being uncertain about staying indicates less than totally "successful" adaptation. The six respondents who did not answer this question were excluded from subsequent analyses, thereby limiting our sample size to 242.

Plans regarding residency in Canada were compared for ten independent variables using chi-square tests. Seven variables relate to current demographic characteristics: sex, education (university graduate or not), marital status, having children, city of residence, employment status and social support available. Employment status was dichotomized into two groups: employed (including self-employed, full-time and part-time workers) and not employed (including unemployed, retired, disabled, houseparents, full-time students and those living on welfare). Current social support was constructed from the question, "Thinking about your family, friends and neighbours currently living here in Canada, would you say that you had a strong, average, weak or no support network to help you deal with most of your problems?" Responses were dichotomized into no social support and some social support (including those reporting strong, average or weak support networks).

Three variables relate to the situation at the time of immigration (English or French speaking skills upon arrival, social support network upon urban or rural origins). Speaking skills were determined by the participants' responses to the question, "Did you know how to speak either official language when you first

immigrated to Canada.” The question on current social networks was altered slightly to assess social support network upon arrival. We asked “Thinking about your support network of family, friends and neighbours when you first came to Canada, would you say that you had a strong, average, weak or no support network to help you deal with most of your problems in settling here?” The same dichotomous coding schema, used above, applies. If respondents reported they had primarily lived in a rural or farming area or small town in their country of origin, they were coded as rural. If they responded that they lived in a suburban area or city, they were coded as urban.

Many of these independent variables are related, so it was important to also conduct a multivariate logistic regression to determine the independent association between each of these variables and residency plans. Due to the limitation of sample size, only seven of the ten independent variables listed above could be included in the logistic regression (SAS User’s Group 1986). Two variables that were thought to be of lesser importance theoretically were not included in the analysis. The two excluded variables were whether the immigrant was from an urban or rural area and current city of residence. A third variable, social support network upon arrival, was excluded from the analysis, although it was significant in the bivariate analysis, because it was highly correlated with another variable, current social support network. We felt the latter was a more important predictor of current long-term plans than social support upon arrival.

## Results

Table 1 provides a descriptive profile of the sample. Slightly more than half of the respondents were male (54.5%). The participants had relatively high levels of formal education, with almost half having a university degree (44.2%). More than half were currently working (56.5%). There was approximately an even division between respondents who were married or living common-law (51.7%) and those not married (48.3%). Almost half of the respondents had at least one child (45.5%). Approximately two-thirds of the respondents lived in Toronto (62%). Upon arrival, a fifth of the sample (21.7%) had no social support. This had declined to 11.9% without social support at the time of our interview. More than three-quarters of our sample immigrated from a city or suburban area in their country of origin (76%). It was relatively rare (17.4%) among our sample to have arrived in Canada without the ability to speak either of our official languages.

Analyses of the dichotomous independent variables (see table 2) indicate that newcomers who plan to stay in Canada are more likely to be married ( $p < .01$ ) and to have had at least some social support network on arrival and currently ( $p < .05$ ). Two statistical trends ( $p < .10$ ) suggest that those currently working and those with children are more likely to plan on staying in Canada permanently. Neither sex, being a university graduate, living in Toronto, immigrating from an urban area,

nor ability to speak English or French upon arrival was significantly associated with future plans regarding residency in Canada. According to Aron and Aron (1997), samples of this size have adequate power to detect large and medium effect sizes at the .05 significance levels.

The logistic regression analysis predicting whether the respondent planned to stay in Canada was significant (See Table 3). Married respondents were two and

**TABLE 1 Demographic Characteristics of Sample (n= 242 unless otherwise stated)**

Variable	n (%)
<b>Sex</b>	
Female	110 (45.5%)
Male	132 (54.5%)
<b>University graduate</b>	
No university degree	135 (55.8%)
GE university degree	107 (44.2%)
<b>Currently employed (n=239)</b>	
Not working	104 (43.5%)
Currently working	135 (56.5%)
<b>Marital status</b>	
Married/Common-Law	125 (51.7%)
Not married (never married, separated, widowed, divorced)	117 (48.3%)
<b>Have children</b>	
No children	132 (54.5%)
Have children	110 (45.5%)
<b>City of residence</b>	
Ottawa/Windsor/Thunder Bay	92 (38.0%)
Toronto	150 (62.0%)
<b>Social Support Network currently (n=226)</b>	
No support network	27 (11.9%)
Some support network	199 (88.1%)
<b>Immigrated from Urban Area in County of Origin</b>	
Country/Small town	58 (24.0%)
City/suburb	184 (76.0%)
<b>English or French speaking skills on arrival</b>	
Spoke neither	42 (17.4%)
Spoke some English or French	200 (82.6%)
<b>Social Support Network on arrival (n=226)</b>	
No support network	49 (21.7%)
Some support network	177 (78.3%)

Note: += p<0.10; \*= p<0.05; \*\* = p<0.01; \*\*\*= p<0.001

a half times more likely than non-married respondents to plan on staying in Canada. Similarly, those with some social support network were also two and a half times more likely than those without any social support network to plan on staying in Canada. Neither sex, having children, having completed university, speaking English or French upon arrival nor being employed was significantly associated with the outcome variable.

## Discussion

There are several limitations to this study and therefore conclusions must be viewed with caution. This study does not claim to be representative because it was based on a non-random sample. Furthermore, it was limited to newcomers who could speak English at the time of interview, to those who lived in one of

**TABLE 2 Demographic characteristics of immigrants who plan to remain in Canada versus those who are thinking of leaving (n= 242 unless otherwise stated)**

Variables	Plan to Leave/ Unsure (%)	Plan to Stay (%)
<b>Sex</b>		
Female	34.5%	65.5%
Male	28.8%	71.2%
<b>University graduate</b>		
No university degree	34.9%	65.1%
GE university degree	27.1%	72.9%
<b>Currently employed (n=239)</b>		
Not working	37.5%	62.5%*
Currently working	27.4%	72.6%
<b>Marital status</b>		
Married	23.2%	76.8%***
Not married	40.2%	59.8%
<b>Have children</b>		
No children	36.4%	63.6%*
Have children	25.5%	74.5%
<b>City of residence</b>		
Ottawa/Windsor/Thunder Bay	34.8%	65.2%
Toronto	29.3%	70.7%
<b>Social Support Network currently (n=226)</b>		
No support network	48.1%	51.9%**
Some support network	27.6%	72.4%
<b>Immigrated from Urban Area in County of Origin</b>		
Country/Small town	34.5%	65.5%
City/suburb	30.4%	69.6%
<b>English or French speaking skills on arrival</b>		
Spoke neither	28.6%	71.4%
Spoke some English or French	32.0%	68.0%
<b>Social Support Network on arrival (n=226)</b>		
No support network	42.9%	57.1%**
Some support network	26.6%	73.4%

Note: \* = p<0.10; \*\* = p<0.05; \*\*\* = p<0.01

**Table 3: Demographic Characteristics of Immigrant who plan to remain in Canada versus those who are thinking of leaving (n= 224)**

Variables	Odds Ratio
Male	1.10
University graduate	1.48
Currently employed	1.35
Currently Married	2.47*

Variables	Odds Ratio
Have children	0.85
Some Social Support Network currently	2.44*
English or French speaking skills on arrival	0.72

Note: Improvement Chi-Square 16.18, d.f.=7, p=.02; \* = p<0.05.

the four designated Ontario cities and to those who have been in Canada for less than five years.

Settlement in and adaptation to a new country is an extremely challenging and strenuous process and therefore, returning to one's 'home country' or leaving for a better place is an option many newcomers entertain if there are discrepancies between their expectations and the realities they face. It is interesting to note that almost a third of our respondents were planning to leave Canada or were not sure if they would be staying. In spite of the fact that there is very little or no information available on the social and economic costs of emigration, it is safe to assume that the economic costs of "unsuccessful" adaptation are substantial. Akbari (1995) for example showed that in 1990, there was a positive public finance transfer from the immigrants to the Canadian treasury. When immigrants choose to leave Canada permanently, the economic and social consequences for the country are therefore negative.

The two key factors this study identified as indicative of planning to stay in Canada are having a social support network and being married. These findings were the same for both the bivariate and multivariate analysis. Consequently, we can assume that they are each independently associated with "successful" adaptation, even when controlling for other variables. In further exploratory analysis, we had conducted a chi-square test of social support and marital status which indicated that these variables were not significantly associated with each other. In other words, married individuals were not more likely to have social support networks.

It is not surprising that those who have no support network feel isolated and therefore less inclined to remain in Canada. Taylor (1986) and Massey et al. (1987) have argued that the presence of kin and support networks reduce the negative consequences of immigration. Even among non-immigrants, the presence of social support is associated with higher well-being (Fischer and Sollie 1993). In turn, those who have higher well being probably find the settlement process easier. Supportive friends and relatives provide a sense of security to newcomers who know they have someone to turn to in case of an emergency. Furthermore, those with an extensive social support network may be motivated to stay in Canada so as to remain near their friends and relatives. These findings indicate the importance of programs such as the HOST program of the Settlement Directorate of Citizenship and Immigration Canada, which works to connect new immigrants and refugees to Canadian families. It suggests that newcomers who

arrive without a social support network should be particularly targeted for this program. This finding also underscores the importance of connecting newcomers with ethno-specific and cultural groups to develop social support networks.

The cross-sectional nature of this study does not allow us to explore causality. It is not clear whether newcomers who do not develop any social support become discouraged and contemplate leaving. Another possibility is that newcomers who arrive in Canada less committed to staying are less likely to build a social support network. Longitudinal, representative studies are needed to untangle this relationship.

Our second significant finding of being married as indicative of planning to stay in Canada is supported by existing literature. Montgomery (1996) found that being married was the a powerful predictor of both subjective adaptation and economic adaptation.

One explanation for our finding may be that the newcomers married since their arrival here which has promoted settlement. We were interested in how common an event it was to marry after arrival in Canada and if that had any influence on planning to stay. Of the 125 married respondents, 36 (28.8%) were married since their arrival in Canada. In a chi-square analysis of only the currently married respondents, we determined that there was no statistical difference between these two categories ( $p=.39$ ). In other words, those who married since immigration were not more likely to plan on remaining permanently in Canada than those who were married at the time of immigration. The statistical difference lies between those married and those not married.

Another possibility is that married individuals are more stable. Relocation with a spouse often involves the need for both partners to obtain jobs back in the country of origin and to mutually agree on leaving Canada. Consequently, it is usually easier to relocate when one is not married, without all the responsibilities that marriage entails. These facts may be related to the higher likelihood of planning to remain in Canada among married individuals.

Furthermore, other studies have indicated that married adults report being happier than unmarried adults (Clarke-Stewart et al. 1988). Individuals who are happier may be less motivated to relocate. Being married may also reflect elements of having a social support network, discussed above. Even among non-immigrants, marriage has been found to be a buffer against loneliness (Fischer and Sollie 1993). Consequently, issues of loneliness and homesickness are probably less acute among those who are married or living common-law. "The institution of marriage provides various supports and benefits which assist subjective adaptation and coping with life in general" (Montgomery 1996). It is interesting that having children, while marginally significant ( $p<.10$ ) in the bivariate analysis, failed to reach significance in the multivariate analysis. It seems that being married is a more important familial factor than having children in predicting long-term plans to stay in Canada.

We had anticipated that current employment would be a significant predictor of plans to stay in Canada (Nwadoria and McAdoo 1996). Although employment

reached the  $p < .10$  level of significance in bivariate analysis, it was not a significant factor in the multivariate model. Some of the non-working respondents were retired, home-makers or students who may have chosen not to work. This data set did not allow exploration of the role of choice in employment status. Further research with larger, representative samples would facilitate our understanding of this factor.

Previous research on immigration (Nwadoria and McAdoo 1996; Pendakur and Pendakur 1997) had also lead us to believe that the ability to speak an official language on arrival would play a role in promoting “successful” adaptation. In neither the bivariate nor multivariate analysis was this factor significant. It is possible our lack of significant findings reflects our sampling strategy. We were only able to conduct our interviews in English and therefore respondents who had not mastered English at the time of the interview were excluded from our sample. Immigrants who do not become competent in English in the first few years after their arrival are likely to experience greater difficulties than those who learn the language quickly.

Toronto receives more than one-third of all the immigrants to Canada each year. In 1996 for example, 224, 050 immigrants came to Canada, out of which 72,471 arrived in Toronto (Citizenship and Immigration, *Facts and Figures* 1996). The city also has the widest array of ethno-specific agencies and cultural groups. We had anticipated that these characteristics might make immigrants in the Toronto area more likely to stay in Canada than those in the three smaller communities we sampled. We did not find support for this hypothesis in our analyses.

We had also anticipated that immigrants from rural or small towns would have more difficulties related to settlement in the four urban areas we sampled. We failed to detect a significant difference with respect to plans for permanent residency.

## Conclusion

This article reports the results of bivariate and multivariate analyses of data on residency plans collected from 242 newcomers to Ontario, Canada. Both bivariate analysis and logistic regression indicated two variables to be significant: being married and having social support networks. The nature of the study sample cautions against generalizing the findings to the general population of immigrants. At the same time, the findings of this analysis may have implications for settlement process and service delivery. Upon arrival in Canada, it would be helpful if all newcomers receive orientation and assistance with adaptation (for example, HOST program and orientation counseling). Community agencies should be adequately funded to play a leadership role in this area.

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