

IMMIGRANT FATHERS

POINTS OF TENSION

Immigrant fathers often find themselves in a double bind, caught between the role they've been socialized to play and the situation and expectations of their new country.

ROLE AS A PROVIDER / LOSS OF SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

Deskilling and a loss of social standing can give immigrant fathers the feeling that they're failing to fulfil their paternal duties, which can have an impact on their self-esteem and family relationships.

SURVIVAL OF THE FAMILY IN QUEBEC / HELP FOR FAMILY BACK HOME

Immigrant fathers may find themselves torn between their responsibilities toward the people who immigrated with them and the people left behind (support for family members, repayment of debts, etc.).

WORK, SCHOOL, AND LANGUAGE LEARNING / FILLING IN FOR EXTENDED FAMILY

Immigrant fathers may need to spend more time with their spouses and children, given the absence of a natural support network for child rearing, all while having to fulfil numerous outside obligations.

MAIN FIGURE OF AUTHORITY

WORK, SCHOOL AND LANGUAGE LEARNING

CULTURAL EXPECTATIONS

CUSTOMARY CHILD-REARING

VALUES OF FREEDOM AND EQUALITY IN QUEBEC

ADAPTATION OF CHILDREN TO A NEW SOCIETY

STATE INTERVENTIONISM

SURVIVAL OF THE FAMILY IN QUEBEC

LOSS OF SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

ADAPTATION OF CHILDREN TO A NEW SOCIETY

FILLING IN FOR EXTENDED FAMILY

ROLE AS A PROVIDER

HELP FOR FAMILY BACK HOME

VALUES OF FREEDOM AND EQUALITY IN QUEBEC

ADAPTATION OF CHILDREN TO A NEW SOCIETY

STATE INTERVENTIONISM

MAIN FIGURE OF AUTHORITY / VALUES OF FREEDOM AND EQUALITY IN QUEBEC

Immigrant fathers may feel the need to maintain family unity through their role as an authority figure, while their spouses and children may be more drawn to values that offer greater individual freedom.

CULTURAL EXPECTATIONS / ADAPTATION OF CHILDREN TO A NEW SOCIETY

For some immigrant fathers, it can be hard to reconcile their native culture and the heritage they want to pass on to their children with the culture of the country where their children will build their future, which may seem full of potential dangers and traps.

CUSTOMARY CHILD-REARING / STATE INTERVENTIONISM

Immigrant fathers may feel torn between the desire to raise their children a certain way and the temptation to step back from that role or send the children back to their home country if their disciplinary methods are considered inappropriate or unacceptable in Quebec and they aren't aware of alternatives.

Source: *Les hommes immigrants et leur vécu familial : impact de l'immigration et intervention*. Publications Centre de santé et de services sociaux de la Montagne. Centre de recherche et de formation du CSSS de la Montagne, No. 4 November 15, 2007

TOOL DESCRIPTION GUIDE

POINTS OF TENSION

Just as there is a diversity among fathers, there is diversity in the experiences of adapting to a new situation and country. The Points of Tension tool is intended for practitioners and community workers who want to raise their awareness of certain dimensions of the migration process that affect immigrant fathers, to help them to adapt their position accordingly.

Immigrant fathers face two types of pressure during their adaptation process.

- On the one hand, they have to assume their original role as the pillar of their family – a role for which they have been socialized and which has been shaped by the social, economic and cultural conditions of their country of origin (pressure to self-preserve).
- On the other hand, they must deal with the new realities of migration (pressure to adapt).

The tool illustrates this double bind of continuity and change present in various dimensions of fathers' daily lives, resulting in a redefinition of their identity as fathers. It should be noted that immigrant fathers will not necessarily experience all of the challenges represented by the tool; by the same token, they may face challenges that are not mentioned in the tool.

RECOMMENDED USE

The tool provides practitioners and community workers with reference points for their exploratory work that may help fuel discussions and promote understanding of the realities and challenges of immigrant fathers from the fathers' own points of view (how they talk about it, what words they use). By considering six dimensions of migration that can have a particular impact on immigrant fathers, practitioners and community workers will identify the complex issues involved in the adaptation process that are specific to each father encountered, consequently their actions can be tailored to the father's specific needs.

Open-ended, general questions will make it possible for immigrant fathers to tell their stories, naming the issues that concern them. For example:

- Tell me about your experience since you've been here. Do you face any particular issues or challenges? What concerns you most now?
- What changes have you made since you started the migration process?
- How would you like to continue your adaptation?
- What new balance would you like to find between continuity and change?
- What resources are you using in your community?

The Points of Tension tool enables practitioners and community workers to address the many questions and the feelings of ambivalence immigrant fathers have. These are not always easy to resolve, and it is here that psychosocial support plays its greatest role.

POSITION AND COURSES OF ACTION

Here are a few principles to guide practitioners and community workers in both the position they take and in their intervention with immigrant fathers. The starting points for discussion under each item are examples of questions they can use for inspiration for their discussions.

➔ Establish a relationship of trust by emphasizing strengths

Issues

It is important to recognize the factors of psychological and social stress related to the migratory stages and the emotions these can elicit (sometimes anger, depression, or loss of self-esteem). Given the effects of traditional male socialization and the role of immigrant fathers as the pillar of the family as well as their fear of stigmatization, they are rarely open about their difficulties or concerns, even if this affects their psychological well-being.

Recommendations

It's important to create a safe space with immigrant fathers; a space where they can tell their stories (significant experiences in the country of origin, migration and adaptation trajectory, possible experiences of racism and discrimination, etc.) and thus establish a relationship of trust, while in the process emphasizing their courage, strengths and resilience, as well as the efforts they made for their family's well-being throughout the migratory journey.

Starting points for discussion

It takes a lot of courage to build a new life in a country you know little about. Tell me about what you've achieved in the process of migration. Often, immigrants can experience difficult times when they feel rather alone. They may even be directly or indirectly affected by racism/discrimination in the course of their migration. How did you get through the more difficult situations and what strengths did you discover that you had? What are you most proud of?

➔ Become aware of your own perceived notions of a “good father”

Issues

It's important for practitioners and community workers to be aware of their own perceptions of an immigrant man or father as well as those of a “good father,” a concept that has been constantly evolving in Quebec over the past 50 years. It can be difficult to guide and support an immigrant father without starting from the way he sees his role, what matters most to him, what he feels he's already accomplished for his family, even if this doesn't always correspond to the expectations of today's Quebec.

Recommendations

Gently probe the concept of a “good father” with the immigrant father, especially in terms of parental engagement or involvement, before looking at him according to his own cultural standards. Place value on his role based on his strengths and on what he does well. Also consider how far he has come in terms of adapting since arriving in the host country, and how much he has sacrificed to improve his family's living conditions; already quite a commitment.

Starting points for discussion

In your opinion, what is a “good father?” What's the most important thing about this role? How, if at all, is it different from the mother's role? Tell us about your own father. What do you think of him? How do you see yourself as an involved father? Have you made any changes in your approach to fatherhood since you arrived here? What contributed to these changes? What differences do you see in the way fathers take on their role in Quebec? What's your opinion about this?

➔ Consider the cultural dimension during any intervention

Issues

In the exploratory work, it is important to take into account the cultural dimension in certain conceptions of the role of father and in referrals to services (family roles and sharing of tasks, male/female status, authority and education, social problems, mental and physical health, etc.).

Recommendations

Explore each person's own conceptions and sensitivities, without presuming opinions or beliefs. This requires an open attitude on the part of the speaker, and often a certain tact. It can be a good idea to learn to deal with certain cultural codes concerning the father, or at least the way his role is perceived in the family. For example, in some cases, be sure to include him directly in discussions, when addressing family members.

Starting points for discussion

How do you divide tasks among family members in your family? Do you discuss it much with your partner? Who makes the decisions in the family? What are your current practices regarding parental discipline? Do you have any examples? Have any of these aspects changed since you arrived here? When someone is in distress, how is it expressed in your culture? What do you do in these cases? Are there differences between men and women? Do you know what services are available here for people/families with certain adaptation or other difficulties? Would you feel comfortable using them and why or why not?

➔ Address changes from the angle of support for adaptation

Issues

Change must not be perceived as something that is imposed. It's important to build a shared understanding of the migratory and cultural adaptation trajectory, of how to strike a balance between continuity and change, and of the means to achieve this balance, all the while respecting individual identities and the pace of adaptation.

Recommendations

Recognize traditional roles, while considering that these may be transformed or challenged by the circumstances of migration (social and economic deskilling, the need to compensate for the absence of the extended family, differences in male/female relationships, modes of parental discipline that are prohibited in the host country, etc.). Approaching change from the angle of support for adaptation (immigrant fathers in transition faced with the family migration project). Conversely, relying on a strict cultural comparison (the immigrant father versus the values and norms of the host society) could leave the father feeling judged or invalidated. In doing so, take the time to explain the norms and the rules in force in the host society to the immigrant father, putting them into perspective (for example, the notion of personal autonomy in a society based on individual rights).

Starting points for discussion

I understand that, for you, certain aspects of your role as a father are very important, giving meaning to your identity. How have you so far managed to adapt this role to specific aspects of the migration context? How do you reconcile the need to support your family through work with the needs of your partner at home? How do you reconcile the importance of children integrating well into Quebec with the need for them to respect your values? How do you reconcile the importance of your family members respecting your authority, and their need for autonomy in a society where individual freedoms are valued?

Source: Hernandez, S. (2022). *À la rencontre des pères immigrants, au-delà du choc culturel*. In S. Bergheul & J. Ramdé (Dir.), *La paternité en contexte migratoire* (pp. 271-296). Université du Québec presses.

➔ Take a positive look at immigration and its impact

Issues

The realities of migration often present challenges for immigrant fathers, but they can also be vectors for positive personal and familial change. The job-hunting context and shrinking social network brought about by migration provide an opportunity for family reunification, often experienced in a very positive way by these fathers, who sometimes discover a new meaning of fatherhood. An immigrant father's perception of the impact of migration on their life, and the stakeholder's view of this, play an essential role.

Recommendations

Taking a positive, constructive look at the challenges of migration (e.g., a form of self-actualization, a promising new start, a courageous step towards the future of the next generation) helps to build on strengths and facilitate the link with an immigrant father. Without denying the difficulties, it's important to see them as a means to success in the adaptation process, which is long, complex and non-linear.

Starting points for discussion

How do you manage to make sense of your migratory journey and remain a committed father in the midst of such upheaval? How do you see certain changes as opportunities that positively affect your personal and family life trajectory? Would you say this has given you the opportunity to become a better father/spouse/man? What changes do you see as challenges for which we can provide support?



To find out more about working with immigrant men, visit the IU-SHERPA digital platform: *Intervenir auprès des hommes immigrants, ai-je une approche adaptée?*

<https://hommes-immigrants.sherpa-recherche.com/>