



Peel Family Pathways Project: Seminar

This research is supported by WES Mariam Assafa's Building Equitable Economies in the Peel Region funding opportunity administered by the Tamarack Institute

A collaborative project between the Peel Institute of
Research & Training – Family Services of Peel and
the University of Toronto – Mississauga

April 2023
Mississauga, Ontario

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Methodology.....	1
Outcomes of Discussion.....	3
The Family Unit.....	3
Pathways.....	4
Systems.....	5
Seminar Evaluation.....	5

Introduction

On Thursday March 30, 2023, the project team hosted a seminar with three overall objectives: (1) to share project findings from the secondary data analyses, the literature review, focus groups, and the family survey; (2) to present the progress made in the development of the Family Needs Framework and proposed Service Pathway models; and (3) to answer questions and receive feedback and guidance from stakeholders serving newcomer immigrant and refugee families in the Region of Peel. This seminar was a primary way to increase awareness of our project and our critical findings with various stakeholders. The seminar was an overall success and provided further insight into the past and current experiences of immigrant and refugee serving agencies and service providers, guidance on how to further develop the models, and potential barriers and facilitators to navigate in the future implementation of the resulting models.

Methodology

The seminar was held in-person from 9:30am to 11:30am on Thursday March 30, 2023, at the Mississauga Grand Banquet and Event Centre located at 35 Brunel Rd. in Mississauga, Ontario. Given our community-based participatory research approach to this project, engaging frontline service providers in the process of model development was imperative to ensuring that these models will be most appropriate to implementation within agencies in Peel.

Invitations were sent out via email in February 2023 to a variety of stakeholders in the Region of Peel who provide services or engage in some form with newcomer immigrant and refugee families and/or individual members. Stakeholders were asked to register for the event via Eventbrite to ensure that guests in attendance would not exceed space restrictions at the banquet hall. Registration remained open until two weeks prior to the event. Upon close of registration, there were 83 guests registered to attend. However, on the day of the event, attendance only reached approximately 50 guests. Guests included stakeholders from various settlement agencies, immigrant serving community organizations, employment services, the Peel police, and broader community-based organizations. Guests in attendance also included the project funders from the Tamarack Institute and several members who formed the project Advisory Committee.

Upon arrival to the seminar, guests were asked to register, to write out a name tag, and help themselves to a breakfast and coffee, which was catered by the hall. Guests were asked to read and sign two consent forms; one for photography and one that allowed for use of recorded responses from the discussion portion of the presentation in further model development, the final report, and publications. Responses to discussion questions were recorded via Padlet, an online platform that enables large groups to virtually respond to questions and prompts, as well as in written form by two research assistants.

Just after 9:30am the seminar began. The seminar was opened by the executive director of Family Services of Peel (FSP), who briefly introduced the project, the collaboration between FSP and UTM and provided a Land Acknowledgement. Following the introduction, Monica Riutort, the director of the Peel Institute of Research and Training (PIRT), situated the project in the larger context of immigration in Peel, Canada, and globally, as well as provided more context

around the project. Professor Soo Min Toh from UTM was then invited to speak to the project goals, deliverables, and methodology. Following the introduction of project specifics, the team launched into specific findings and the developing models. Luis Lozano, the statistician at FSP began with a brief overview of some key demographic variables (i.e., 2016 to 2021 population change by municipality, immigrant population by ethnicity, and 2016 to 2021 changes in household composition) related to immigrants and refugees in the Region of Peel. Next, Sarah Costantini, a research assistant at FSP discussed synthesized findings from the literature review, family survey, and focus groups in regard to family needs, service pathways, and family programming. Following the findings, she presented to the two models (the Family Needs Framework and the Service Pathway) the team was working on developing and seeking further guidance from stakeholders from the seminar on. Professor Soo Min closed the presentation off with limitations, areas for further research, and key takeaways.

Following the presentation of findings, the floor was opened for a brief question and answer period where guests were able to share initial thoughts, questions, and feedback. After the question period, the shift was made to the discussion portion of the seminar. Here, we asked guests to discuss the questions provided at their tables and if possible, to use Padlet to record their responses virtually. The questions provided for discussion centred on three broad areas: (1) the family unit; (2) pathways; and (3) systems. The questions were as follows:

Family unit: How do you define the family unit? Have you worked with the family as a unit? What are the strengths and weaknesses of working with the family unit?

Pathway: What do you think about working with a pathway? How familiar are you with working with pathways? Which pathways are you most familiar with? In your experience, does knowing and using pathways in the service context improve outcomes?

Systems: Have you worked with the pre- and post-migration system of assessing and meeting needs? Which level within systems do you focus on most (macro, meso, micro)? What are the benefits of having a framework to approach service policies, research, development, and/implementation?

Guests engaged in small group discussions for approximately 10 minutes, after which we gathered back to the larger group to share responses and thoughts together within each theme of questions. Following a fruitful discussion that lasted approximately 20 minutes, the seminar was closed by Soo Min, who thanked the guests for attending, as well as to complete a short evaluation survey of the seminar. The evaluation survey was also sent out after the seminar along with a thank you email to guests for attending and providing feedback and experiential accounts that would assist in furthering our research and models.

Outcomes of Discussion

Responses from guests during the discussion portion of the seminar were recorded via Padlet as guests typed out the thoughts, and in written form by research assistants. These responses were

compiled together under each category and thematically analyzed. The themes generated were largely descriptive in nature as the questions were quite specific. The following sections outline the themes generated.

The Family Unit

To be able to effectively work with the family unit, we need to understand how the family is being defined, who is being considered as belonging the family system, and thus, likely to have needs connected to other family members, and to have impacts on the wellbeing and mental health of other members. As such, it was critical to ask service providers how they view the family unit to develop an understanding of how we may define the family unit in connection with the models we are developing. To be able to effectively implement the models at the family system level, there will need to be guidance as to what the family looks like.

In addition, it is critical to understand strengths and limitations to taking a family approach to develop the framework. This will help to develop a framework that makes use of strengths and strives to minimize barriers where possible. Guests provided critical understanding to what the strengths and limitations are of working with the family unit.

Defining the Family

Guests had various ways of defining the family unit, ranging from more standardized definitions to those which were more expansive and viewed family as something that holds very individual meaning to each immigrant and refugee with whom the provider has contact with. Standard definitions include those from guests who defined the family unit as “*groups of people living under the same roof*”, “*the family unit as the household*”, “*a group of people to live together*” or “*a group of people who are biologically connected.*” These are viewed as standard definitions as they follow along with definitions of the family according to the Census, the government, and in accordance with more traditional understandings.

Expanded definitions refers to those that include culture and cultural values, extended family members, more-than-human members (i.e., pets), relationality and emotionality, and other highly individual understandings of family. Several service providers highlighted how definitions of the family unit vary by culture, family may include pets, that family goes beyond the mother, father and children to include extended family members, such as grandparents, and may go beyond those related by blood to include anyone who provides immediate support. The service providers highlighted the importance of understanding family as it is defined by each client because for some, family may be the nuclear family unit (i.e., mother, father, and children), or it could encompass extended family members, or be something else all together (i.e., chosen family). Thus, service providers predominantly supported the need to take a broad understanding of what family means and create space for the individual members to define what family means to them.

A Family Approach: Strengths

Service providers highlighted several strengths and advantages to taking a family approach to meeting the needs of newcomers. The most important strength to service providers to taking a family approach was that it enabled a “*more holistic approach/view*” to needs and wellbeing.

This endorsement for the ability to take a holistic approach when taking a family approach points to understanding and recognition that individuals are embedded in systems, and often most deeply embedded within the family system. Thus, individual members will be deeply affected by the needs, stressors, and wellbeing of other family members with whom they are connected to. Thus, by taking a family approach, service providers could more readily understand how an individual is being affected by others and that to effectively meet the needs of that specific individual, they may also need to meet the needs of other members.

Additional strengths highlights include the ability to identify overlapping needs which may reduce the duplication of services in some cases, the ability to provide support for the entire unit, to create insight amongst members of the needs of one another, and the potential to enhance integration. Overall, these responses highlight the importance of a systems approach to understanding and meeting the needs of individuals. When we only look at the individual, we can run the risk of duplicating services, missing the source of stress, and preventing relationality and connection in the pursuit of improved wellbeing and mental health.

A Family Approach: Limitations and Challenges

While there are several advantages to working with the family unit, like any approach, there are various limitations and challenges that arise. The primary limitation to a family approach that service providers highlighted is the lack of comfort that some individuals may feel in sharing information around family. For example, individuals may want to discuss mental health, gender or sexuality but due to cultural values and beliefs, and stigma around these areas, there may be fear in discussing such topics and concerns in the presence of certain family members. This can lead to individual suppressing critical needs that they have and that require support.

Further limitations are that a family approach may lead to the neglect of individual needs, may result in conflicting needs, which can create barriers to support, and is often more time consuming, which is a major challenge in a context of austere funding and low staff levels. Challenges also exist at a structural and systemic level as well. Service providers also highlighted funding structures that create barriers to which age groups can be served, as children, youth, and adults tend to be separated. This significantly impacts the ability to take a family approach. Thus, to bring in a family approach will require structural and policy change, as well as change to funder requirements.

Pathways

Enhancing Pathways

The responses from service providers regarding pathways highlighted above all else that there is an imperative need to increase collaboration and coordination to overcome the current fragmentation and silos that form service pathways. Service providers had a fruitful conversation about why there needs to be more focus on collaboration and coordination and how the system may do that. There is a need for more coordination in sharing of progress, change, and research among agencies to reduce time and resources spent searching for what is going on across agencies. They shared various existing resources for networking and connecting, including PINET and peel.cico.ca, as well as offered suggestion for moving forward. Suggests for improving pathways included a centralized referral database, similar to what our pathway model

suggested. Further, another provided suggest a navigator connected to community organizations in the immigrant's home countries to assist in preparing immigrants for arrival in Canada and to overcome challenges associated with online pre-arrival services.

Challenges

While there was widespread support for enhancing pathways through coordination and collaboration, service providers highlighted multiple barriers to continuous and well-flowing pathways. Some of these exist at the systemic and policy level, including funding requirements, eligibility criteria, and divisions between social services, health care services, and mental health services. At the organization level, main challenges that result in broken pathways includes high workloads and staffing issues.

Systems

The discussion on systems approaches was limited due to time constraints of the seminar. Thus, there was less offered in response to these questions. However, overall there was agreement that there is a need for more extensive systems approaches due to the complexity of needs and the intersectional and interconnected nature of the needs of newcomers. That is, needs cannot be effectively addressed when we do not consider them as connected to other factors and forces at the micro, meso, and macro levels.

Several of the service providers indicated that they had some experience with a systems approach. They indicated experience working mostly at the micro level, with some focus at the meso or community level. In addition, a couple of service providers indicated a focus on pre-migration alongside post-migration factors, however, most looked at post-migration systems.

Seminar Evaluation

Following the end of the discussion the guests were asked to fill out an evaluation survey on Qualtrics. Due to the time limit of our venue very few guests were able to fill out the survey during the seminar. Consequently, the evaluation survey was emailed to the 50 guests. Of the approximately 50 guests who attended the seminar, 17 guests responded to the evaluation survey.

The first part of the evaluation survey asked the guests to rate the usefulness of the various contents that were presented in the session to their own work on a scale of 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent). The mean scores were as follows; 'knowledge of the experience of immigrants and refugees' had a mean score of 4.12, 'Demographic profile of the immigrant and refugee population in the Region of Peel' had a mean score of 3.88, 'Needs of immigrants and refugees from the perspective of families' had a mean of 4.06, 'Current pathways to and through services' had a mean score of 3.88, 'Gaps or areas to address in services' had a mean score of 4.06, 'Family Needs Framework' had a mean score of 3.88, and 'Proposed Service Pathway' had a mean score of 3.88. In summary, the content presented at the session was on average between 'good' or 'very good' in usefulness to the work of our guests.

The guests were also asked to indicate whether they thought the presentation was timely, professional informative, relevant, and interesting by responding with 'yes', 'no', or 'unsure'. All 17 respondents indicated that the presentation was professional, informative, relevant, and

interesting. 16 respondents expressed that the presentation was timely, while 1 respondent stated that they were “unsure” about the presentation’s timeliness.

Furthermore, guests were asked to indicate what statement best described their feeling about the information presented in the seminar. 10 guests responded with “I am excited to use the information I gained to help me do my job better”, 1 guest responded with “I have no positive or negative feelings about having attended the session”, and 3 guests responded with “other.” The respondents who indicated “other” were asked to elaborate further in another questions. The responses indicated that the seminar was a good place to collaborate and connect as it was a “great opportunity to discuss the issues together” and it was an “excellent seminar good opportunity to network and share resources...” The responses from the evaluation survey emphasized above all else that there is a continued need for collaboration. The seminar was successful in creating an opportunity to harmonize and organize the various issues, ideas, and research that has been up until this point conducted mostly independently among organizations. The responses from the evaluation survey indicate the continued need to come together so that knowledge and resources can be frequently and easily transferred between the various units supporting the newcomer population in Canada.