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Comparing Immigrant Children in Canada and the United States: Similarities and Differences

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INTRODUCTION

International migration continues to have a profound impact today in Canada and in the United States of America. Migration is a major cause of population growth, accounting for slightly less than half of United States growth and over two-thirds of Canadian growth at the start of the millennium (Barbieri and Ouellette 2012, tables A2 and A3). Migration also affects the foreign-born share of national populations. In 2011, over forty million foreign-born persons resided in the United States, representing 13 per cent of its population; another 6.8 million foreign-born persons lived in Canada, constituting 21 per cent of its population (Gryn and Gambino 2013; Statistics Canada 2013). Migration additionally is an important source of ethnic and racial diversity, producing large Hispanic and Asian populations in the United States and a sizable Asian population in Canada.

Another impact is the generational legacy of migration. Most immigrants enter as adults, and either bring children with them or have children after arrival. Thus, interest in these offspring accompanies the rising numbers of migrants and the altered source countries that resulted from changed immigration policies in 1962, 1967, and 1975 (enacted in 1978) for Canada and in 1965 for the United States (Boyd 1976; Boyd and Alboim 2012). Terms referring to these children include immigrant children, immigrant youth, children of immigrants, or children in immigrant families (for examples, see CCSD 2002;

Han 2006; Hernandez 2004; Hernandez et al. 2009; Passel 2011; UNICEF Innocenti Insight 2009). These labels include children who are foreign-born with foreign-born parents (the 1.5 generation) and those who have foreign-born parents but who themselves are born in Canada or the United States (the second generation).¹

Growing research now exists on the scholastic achievements, identities, and to a lesser extent (because of their young ages) young adult transitions of children of immigrants and their labour-market characteristics. As well, a core area of research also focuses on the family contexts of young children, primarily using census data. Two rationales drive this focus: demographic and childhood development concerns. Demographically, today one-third of all children under age fifteen in Canada have one, and usually two, foreign-born parents; in the United States, one in four children under age fifteen have one or two foreign-born parents. These percentages in turn reinforce the attention paid to family and socio-demographic settings and the implications of these environments. During the 1990s and the first decade of the new millennium, human development and sociological research showed that the social, emotional, cognitive, and scholastic achievements of children were strongly influenced by their family and socio-demographic contexts.

Census-based studies in the United States and other countries compare and contrast the family and demographic characteristics of immigrant children to the native-born,² indicating proximal factors that may put the well-being of the former at risk. This chapter contributes to this literature by providing a comparative analysis of family data on children living in Canada and the United States around 2006. The results demonstrate American-Canadian similarities in the characteristics of children in immigrant families, along with some notable differences.

FAMILY AND DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS

Why focus on family contexts; what do recent studies suggest; and what are the implications for children of immigrants? First, the rationales for research on children in immigrant families rest on child development frameworks used in psychology and on sociological approaches to social stratification. In both disciplines, the focus is on the way that family characteristics and dynamics influence the development of children and their transition into adulthood and beyond.

In psychology, the pioneering work of Urie Bronfenbrenner (2001; Gabriel, Doiron, Arias de Sanchez, and Wartman 2010) stipulated that family context shaped emotional, cognitive, and social development, along with other interconnecting environments, such as school, community, and society. For sociologists, families are part of a supportive matrix that enables children to access societal resources – to stay in school, to obtain high school or university degrees, to have adequate housing, and to experience good health. Twentieth-century sociologist Max Weber calls these “life chances,” viewing them as central elements of economic classes and productive roles (Breen 2005; Tumin 1967, 56–66). Status attainment research in sociology emphasizes the intergenerational transmission of family background, especially the relationship between family structure, parental education and occupation, siblings, and locational context for the educational and occupational outcomes of offspring.

With respect to the second and third questions, North American research on children generally and on immigrant children more specifically highlights the following family-related factors as affecting children: family structure, number of siblings, language use in the home, parental education, parental employment, level of income (with particular emphasis on low-income, or poor, families), whether or not the home is owned, and the degree of crowding in the home.³ Many of these factors are interrelated. In this chapter, family structure refers to the presence or absence of two parents. Previous research confirms that children living with both biological parents are less likely to experience cognitive, emotional, and social problems that have long-term consequences for well-being (Landale, Thomas, and Van Hook 2001). Two-parent families are less likely to be poor than single-parent families, in part because the likelihood of two adult earners is stronger and because single parents disproportionately are women seeking livelihoods in sex-stratified societies where women, on average, are paid less than men.⁴ On the whole, immigrant children are less likely than children in native-born families to live in single-parent families, although racial and ethnic variations exist (Capps and Fortuny 2006; Hernandez 2004; Hernandez, Macartney, and Blanchard 2010).

To date, research also finds that children in immigrant families have more siblings than those in native-born families. Number of siblings is associated with higher parental fertility and is inversely related to parental education, and thus indirectly related to the

financial well-being of families. Status attainment research finds that many characteristics of the family of origin, including number of siblings, are factors influencing educational outcomes and subsequent occupational attainments. A large number of siblings can dilute potential investment in a specific child or reduce the resources available for higher education or specialized employment training (Boyd 2009; Taubman and Behrman 1986).

Fluency in the major or official language(s) of a society is essential for many tasks of daily living: obtaining information, interacting with others, developing networks, and for adults, finding employment and obtaining social services where needed. An assessment of six projects on the needs of immigrant youth in Ontario finds language difficulties to be pervasive challenges for youth in education, employment, health, and well-being (Kilbride et al. n.d.). In addition to the language skills of individual children and youth, the context of language use in the home is particularly salient for early childhood development; a US study finds that children with linguistically isolated foreign-born mothers have the lowest cognitive development at age twenty-four months (Glick et al. 2012). Other studies show that young immigrant children who have just started school do less well than their native-born counterparts on vocabulary tests when the host country language is not spoken at home (Washbrook, Waldfogel, Bradbury, Corak, and Ghanghro 2012), although disadvantages in math and reading scores may equalize by the teenage years (Worswick 2004). Foreign-born children entering school in the middle years may be more scholastically disadvantaged. One study in Alberta found that English as a Second Language (ESL) students who entered grade nine as ESL beginners between 1989 and 1997 had a dropout rate of 90 per cent (Crowe 2006).

Even though immigrant children learn the destination country language(s), they may do so in the context of linguistically isolated homes, defined in US census data as households where all adults speak a non-English language at home and all cannot speak English “very well” (Siegel, Martin, and Bruno 2001). In addition to starting school with less developed English language skills, such children face additional demands. For example, they may be thrust into the role of linguistic intermediaries: on the one hand, their skills may help their families find needed services and information; on the other hand, traditional parent-child roles and authority may be undermined, leading to lower self-esteem and failure in school (CCSD 2000; Glick 2010; Hernandez et al. 2010).

Language fluency of parents is important beyond the fact that parents stimulate children's language learning in the early years. Little or no fluency in the destination country language(s) means that parents face barriers to involvement in their children's schools and with social service providers (Glick 2010). Host country language skills enhance the capacity of parents to find employment commensurate with their education and training, to learn quickly about their new country, and to interact directly with elementary and secondary educational systems. Language is also a marker for other factors that offer a better environment for children. Washbrook et al. (2012) found that in Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States, immigrant parents who spoke English (and/or French in Canada) had higher educational qualifications, had the same or even higher average incomes, and were less likely to be single parents, compared to the native-born.

Parental socio-economic status, usually measured as educational attainments and economic characteristics, affects the emotional and social development of children and adolescents (Kilbride et al. n.d.; To et al. 2004). As noted previously, parental education is highly associated with the economic resources available to children (Hernandez et al. 2010) because it influences parents' propensities to be in the labour force, the jobs they hold, and their earnings levels. In the United States, children of immigrants are less likely than children with native-born parents to have mothers in the labour force; they also are more likely to live in lower-income homes (Capps and Fortuny 2006; Hernandez et al. 2010; for Canada, see CCSD 2000). Poverty is especially characteristic of the families of immigrant children. A recent US study cites a poverty rate of 23 per cent among the children of immigrants, compared with 18 per cent among the children of the native-born (Passel 2011).

Poverty has pernicious effects on the well-being of children. From a human development perspective, poverty (and low income) creates chaos in children's lives by making it difficult to maintain structured and predictable daily routines and impeding the development of socio-emotional functioning and learning through the lack of regular, sustained, and increasingly complex interactions (Davis et al. 2005; Kilbride et al. n.d.). Compared to those living in financially better-off families, children living in poor families are exposed to more family violence and separations from family members; they have fewer supports from social service providers, less responsive and more authoritarian parents, less parental involvement in children's school activities,

and a higher risk of living in poor neighbourhoods with low-income schools and less-qualified teachers (Evans 2004). In addition, they are at greater risk of having poor health outcomes, lower academic achievements, and lower earnings when they reach adulthood (Landale et al. 2011). Because family structure and poverty are often linked, poor children are more likely to live in single-parent households, thus risking greater family stress, inadequate parental supervision, and multiple family transitions or moves. That being said, however, because children in immigrant families are more likely than those in native-born families to have two parents present, these children may be more protected from certain problems associated with poverty (Landale et al. 2011).

Housing conditions contribute to the “chaos” that can create difficulty in children’s lives and influence their physical and mental well-being (Jackson and Roberts 2001). Home ownership reflects access to potentially higher-quality housing; it also reflects a family commitment to the local neighbourhood and community (Hernandez et al. 2010). Low-quality housing is associated with pollutants and high levels of noise; such housing is often rented. Poor-quality housing is associated with high internal density that can make it difficult for children to find places to do homework (Hernandez et al. 2010), to experience quiet settings (Jackson and Roberts 2001), and to have regular routine interaction with others (Davis et al. 2005). US studies find that the children of immigrants are more likely to live in crowded housing, defined as more than one person per room (Capps and Fortuny 2006; Hernandez et al. 2010).

US scholars who compare family and housing characteristics for children in immigrant and native-born families frequently include additional demographic details, such as the age of children, their geographical locations, and their race and/or ethnic origins. Age indicates the stage of child development and the percentages likely to be attending school. Geography loosely captures the concentration or dispersion of groups, and in the case of US federal and state legislation, it indicates the (un)availability of specific social services, including hospital care and income security programs for migrant populations. Phenotypical characteristics, or the racial composition of immigrant children, frequently correlate with family structure, parental education, labour-force participation, and housing conditions, all of which affect the well-being of children; they may elicit prejudice and discrimination, reduce the opportunities of individuals to

obtain societal resources, and mirror more pervasive social barriers that exist for adults.

CANADA AND THE US COMPARED: DATA SOURCES, MEASURES, AND FOCAL POPULATIONS

Beginning in the 1990s, Hernandez and his associates used census data to extensively document the association between family setting and child well-being in the United States (see Hernandez 2004; Hernandez et al. 2009; Hernandez, Macartney, and Blanchard 2010). Their findings reveal that on the one hand, children in immigrant families are more likely than children in native-born families to be living with two parents; on the other hand, parental education often is lower, mothers are less likely to be employed, and children are much more likely to live in linguistically isolated households, to live in rented rather than owned housing, to live in crowded accommodations, and to live in poverty. These profiles suggest that immigrant children – even those with two parents present – are more likely to live in settings that challenge their well-being and development. Further, race/ethnicity matters; non-White Hispanic, Mexican and other White Hispanic, Southeast Asian, and Black immigrant children are more likely than other immigrant children to be in family situations that may dampen child development and well-being. Subsequently the Hernandez et al. focus on indicators of well-being for immigrant children in the US was adopted by scholars in Australia, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the UK (UNICEF Innocenti Insight 2009).

Left unexplored is the question of whether or not US findings hold for Canada. Addressing this question requires a comparison of Canada and the United States at similar times. Canadian data are from the 2006 Canadian census housed at Statistics Canada Research Data Centres, the most recent census available for analysis outside Statistics Canada. The 2005, 2006, and 2007 American Community Surveys (ACS), available from the Minnesota Population Center (MPC), provide data on immigrant children in the United States. The ACS is an annual survey that replaced the long form of the United States Census starting in 2001; in order to obtain sufficient numbers for analysis, researchers frequently use several contiguous years.

The analysis focuses on children aged 0–14, linking children's records with those of their parents. Three noteworthy differences exist

between the children's files from the two countries, reflecting in-house variable construction at Statistics Canada, the United States Census Bureau, and the MPC. First, family membership is defined more inclusively in the US, as any group of persons with identifiable relationships by blood, marriage, or adoption, whereas Statistics Canada uses two family measures: the census family, which approximates a nuclear family, and the economic family, which is closer to the American definition (Statistics Canada 2010, 125, 132).

Second, definitions of poverty are country-specific. Consequently, poverty comparisons can be made between immigrant and native-born families within Canada or within the United States, but absolute levels cannot be compared across countries. In Canada, Statistics Canada does not use the terms "poverty" or "poverty levels"; instead, it constructs low income cut-offs (LICOS), which are income thresholds below which a family will likely devote a larger share of its income to the necessities of food, shelter, and clothing than the average family. Twenty per cent higher expenditures than the average are used to construct LICOS, which also take into account the size of the city, town, or place where respondents reside, and the size of the family. Two measures are available from census data: LICOS before taxes, which indicate if children reside in families where total income, including government transfer payments, is below specified LICOS for the economic family; and LICOS after taxes, which indicate low income levels after tax payments (Statistics Canada 2009). In the United States, poverty is measured by comparing pre-tax cash income against a threshold that is set at three times the cost of a minimum diet in 1963, updated annually for inflation using the Consumer Price Index, and adjusted for family size and composition and age of householder (Institute for Research on Poverty n.d.; US Census Bureau n.d.). Critics charge that this measure underestimates the extent of poverty and is flawed by not allowing thresholds to vary geographically. One common research- and policy-related response is to use thresholds that are higher than the official levels; thresholds are frequently defined at twice (or 200 per cent) the official poverty threshold (Hernandez, Denton, and Macartney 2009). This chapter provides both measures: the official poverty threshold and levels that are twice that.

Third, questions on language use and proficiency are unique to each country. The American Community Survey asks, "Does this person speak a language other than English at home?" A second question

follows an affirmative reply: “How well does this person speak English (very well, well, not well, not at all)?” Using these two questions, the US Bureau of the Census defines a household as linguistically isolated if all adults speak a language other than English and none speaks English “very well.” Adults are defined as age fourteen or older, thus identifying household members of high-school age and older (Siegel, Martin, and Bruno 2001). In Canada, the 2006 census questionnaire asks what language(s) respondents mostly use and regularly use in the home; no subsequent question exists on how well English or French is spoken. In this chapter, Canadian families are defined as linguistically isolated when all persons age fourteen and older do not use English and/or French either mostly or regularly in the home. Because of the country differences in language questions, the American “linguistic isolation” variable taps into use and proficiency, whereas the Canadian variable measures only usage.

The population of interest, children aged 0–14, is defined as all children living with one or more parent. At least one gay or lesbian parent is captured in the American Community Survey (D. Kristiansen, personal communication, 21 May 2013), and all gay or lesbian parents are present in the Canadian children’s file. However, the analysis excludes these parents when presenting parental characteristics because no information exists on how such individuals identify themselves in relationship to fathering or mothering roles. This study also excludes Aboriginal children who by virtue of their distinctive histories are of policy concern and have their own distinctive research needs. The Canadian census treats Aboriginal categories as distinct from other categories used to depict minorities that are visible by virtue of skin colour and other phenotypical characteristics. In order to parallel this, persons declaring themselves as American Indian or Alaskan Native (AIAN) either entirely or with another racial affiliation are removed from the US analysis.

In the United States a large number of immigrant children either are unauthorized migrants or live with one or more unauthorized parent. These children represent nearly one-third of children with immigrant parents and between 7 and 8 per cent of all children (Passel 2011; Yoshikawa and Kholoptseva 2013). Since ACS respondents do not indicate their legal status, there is no way to identify these children or their parents except to recognize that certain origin groups, such as Mexican, are likely to contain large numbers of them. Undocumented immigration as a legacy of unskilled labour

migration is not a current issue for Canada, which lacks a long border with a less economically developed country. But both countries have legal temporary residents, including refugee claimants, those with temporary work visas, and international students. In Canada, a census question permits distinguishing temporary residents from those with permanent residence status, but this is not possible with American data. As a result, the initial aggregated comparisons of Canada and the United States include children who are temporary residents. Following Passel (2011), children born in Puerto Rico and other US territories who live in the United States are treated as children living in native-born families.

CROSS-BORDER COMPARISONS

How do the two countries compare with respect to the characteristics of immigrant children and their families? This question is answered by examining demographic characteristics (size, geographical location, and generational composition), and indicators related to childhood development, including number of parents present, size of family, number of siblings, familial linguistic isolation, parental education, parental employment, housing, and household poverty. In terms of demographic characteristics, the Canadian population stands at slightly more than 10 per cent of the United States population. Accordingly, the number of children living in immigrant families in Canada is lower than in the United States (1.6 million versus 14 million). In both countries, the vast majority of these children are native-born (the second generation), and geographical concentration is high for immigrant children compared to residence patterns for children in native-born families (Table 8.1). Seven out of ten Canadian immigrant children live in the five Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs) of Montreal, Toronto, Edmonton, Calgary, and Vancouver. Concentration in a few large cities is not as great in the United States, but nearly four out of ten immigrant children reside in five Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs): New York City and North East New Jersey; Chicago; Dallas–Fort Worth, Texas; Houston–Brazoria, Texas; and Los Angeles–Long Beach (Table 8.1).

These concentrations translate into a predominance of immigrant children in select cities. Figure 8.1 presents the percentage of immigrant children for specific Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs) and for Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs). Over two-thirds of

Table 8.1: Characteristics of children age 0–14 living in immigrant and native-born families and characteristics of their families and parents, Canada and the United States of America

	Canada 2006 ^(a)		USA 2005–07 ^(b)	
	Immigrant families	Canadian-born families	Immigrant families	USA-born families
<i>Number of children</i> ^(c)	1 687 905	3 492 170	13 985 287	42 768 333
Percent children foreign-born	21	(na)	14	(na)
Percent children born in Canada	79	100	86	100
<i>Place of residence, column</i>	100	100	100	100
Montreal/NYC–NE New Jersey	13	11	11	4
Toronto/Chicago	37	9	4	3
Edmonton/Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas	3	3	3	2
Calgary/Houston–Brazoria Texas	5	3	4	2
Vancouver/Los Angeles–Long Beach CA	12	4	12	2
Other CMA/Other SMA	25	46	58	61
Non-CMA/Not identifiable or not an MSA	5	23	8	26
<i>Child age</i>	100	100	100	100
Age 0–4	31	30	36	33
Age 5–12	55	54	52	53
Age 13–14	15	16	13	14
<i>Total Number of Siblings</i>	100	100	100	100
Fewer than 3 siblings	87	91	82	86
3 siblings or more	13	9	18	14
<i>Size of household</i>	100	100	100	100
Fewer than 5 persons	55	67	48	61
5-plus persons in household	45	33	52	39
<i>Linguistic isolation indicator</i> ^(d)	100	100	100	100
Not in a linguistically isolated family	83	100	71	99
In a linguistically isolated family	17	(j)	29	1
<i>Family structure</i> ^(e)	100	100	100	100
Families with both parents	87	80	78	65
Families with lone parents	13	20	22	35
<i>Father university educated</i> ^(f)	100	100	100	100
No	63	78	72	66
Yes	37	22	28	34

Table 8.1 Characteristics of children age 0–14 living in immigrant and native-born families and characteristics of their families and parents, Canada and the United States of America (*Continued*)

	Canada 2006 ^(a)		USA 2005–07 ^(b)	
	Immigrant families	Canadian-born families	Immigrant families	USA-born families
<i>Mother university educated</i> ^(f)	100	100	100	100
No	69	77	75	70
Yes	31	23	25	30
<i>Father Employment Rate</i>	100	100	100	100
Unemployed or not in the Labour Force	12	8	11	9
Employed	88	92	89	91
<i>Mother employment rate</i>	100	100	100	100
Unemployed or not in the labour force	37	26	48	36
Employed	63	74	52	64
<i>Overcrowded accommodation</i> ^(g)	100	100	100	100
No	86	98	72	92
Yes	14	2	28	8
<i>Housing tenure</i>	100	100	100	100
Rented	31	21	42	32
Owned	69	79	58	68
<i>Poverty threshold type I</i> ^(h)	100	100	100	100
Above	79	91	78	83
Below	21	9	22	17
<i>Poverty threshold type II</i> ⁽ⁱ⁾	100	100	100	100
Above	73	87	50	63
Below	27	13	50	37

(a) Excludes persons of Aboriginal origins in Canada.

(b) Excludes all persons in the USA giving American Indian and/or Alaskan Native as their race.

(c) Data for the USA are averaged across three years using the 2005, 2006 and 2007 ACS.

(d) No person aged 14 and older in a Canadian household speaks English and/or French. No person aged 14 and older in a U.S. household speaks English at home and all persons aged 14 and older cannot speak English well.

(e) Data for the USA calculated as persons who are not married and living together.

(f) University bachelor's degree or higher.

(g) More than 1.0 persons per room in the dwelling.

(h) Type I refers to the LICO line after tax transfers in Canada and to the absolute poverty measure in the USA.

(i) Type II refers to the LICO line before tax transfers in Canada and to being 200 per cent above the absolute poverty line in the USA.

(j) Less than 0.5 percent.

Source: Special tabulations produced for this chapter from the RDC 2006 Canadian census file and from the 2005–07 American Community Surveys

children aged 0–14 who live in Toronto reside in migrant families; in Vancouver, approximately six in ten children are immigrant children, as are approximately one in three in Montreal and Edmonton, and two in five in Calgary. In the United States, six out of ten children in the Los Angeles–Long Beach MSA are immigrant children, as are four out of ten in the MSAs of New York City–Northeast New Jersey and Houston–Brazoria, Texas. Nearly one-third of those in Chicago and over one-third in the Dallas–Fort Worth MSA are immigrant children.

Table 8.1 provides additional demographic, social, and economic information on immigrant and native-born children and their families in Canada and the United States. Children in Canadian families tend to be slightly older than those in American families; for those living in migrant families, this feature is consistent with the slightly lower percentages in Canada who are second-generation (see Table 8.1). In the United States, Passel (2011) notes that the percentage who are foreign-born (or the 1.5 generation) increases for immigrant children in the older age groups.

Canadian children are also living in smaller households with fewer siblings. However, compared with their native-born counterparts, immigrant children in both countries have higher percentages living in families with three siblings or more, and with five or more persons residing in the household. In both countries, much higher percentages are living in families where no persons aged fourteen and older use English and/or French mostly or regularly at home (Canada) or where English is not spoken well by any adults (United States).

Conventional immigration policy comparisons invariably contrast the Canadian emphasis on recruiting workers with the American focus on family reunification. Although very recent policy changes nuance these contrasts (see Boyd 2013), it is true that recent immigrants to Canada are well educated. As a result, immigrant children in Canada are more likely than immigrant children in the United States to have fathers and mothers with university degrees. Further, the percentages having university-educated parents are higher for immigrant children than native-born children in Canada, while the reverse holds for the United States. As well, fewer immigrant children live in lone-parent families, and the percentages are lowest for immigrant children in Canada (Table 8.1).

Among children aged 0–14, the percentages living in owned housing are higher in Canada than in the United States and the

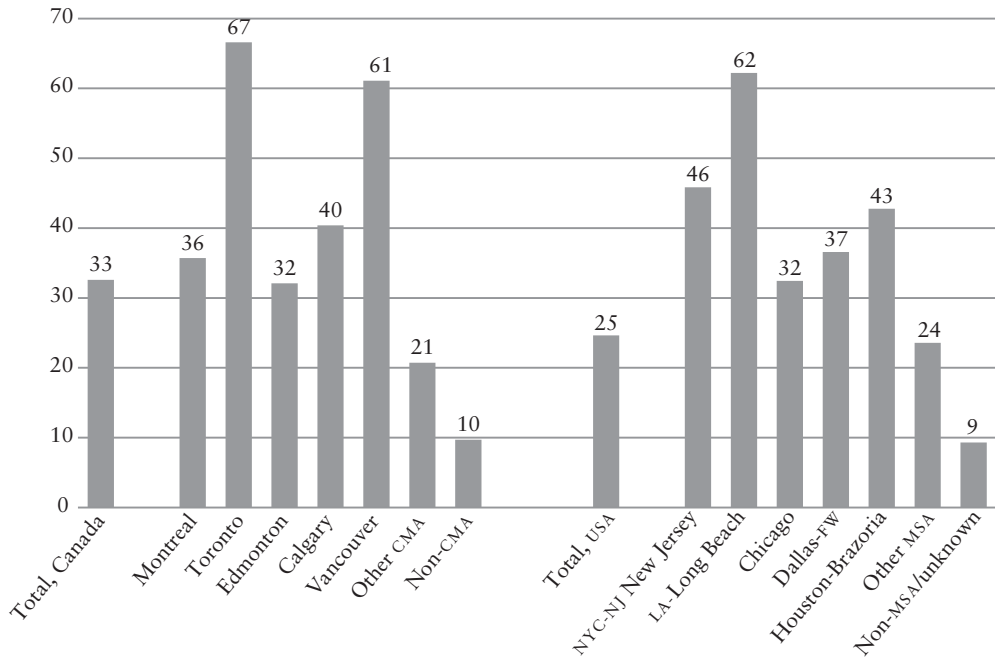


Figure 8.1 Percentage of all children ages 0–14 who are living in immigrant families for select areas, Canada (2006) and the United States (2005–07)

percentages living in overcrowded accommodations are lower. Nevertheless, earlier findings observed for the United States are confirmed: compared to their native-born counterparts, immigrant children in both countries have lower percentages living in owned accommodations, and they are more likely to be living in crowded conditions.

Economic well-being also varies. As shown in Table 8.1, the fathers of immigrant children are slightly more likely to be unemployed or not in the labour force than the fathers of native-born children. In both countries, higher percentages of mothers of immigrant children are unemployed or not in the labour force compared to mothers in native-born families; however, mothers have higher employment rates in Canada than the United States. As a result, the percentage of mothers of Canadian immigrant children who are employed is higher than that observed in the United States. But the risk of residing in a poor family remains. Although measures cannot be directly compared

across countries, in both Canada and the United States, the percentages of immigrant children living in households defined as poor are much higher than observed for children of native-born parents.

CHILDREN AND RACE

Undoubtedly, national differences in immigration policy, modes of entry (undocumented, permanent resident, temporary), and categories of legal admission (economic, family reunification) help explain differences between Canadian and the United States in numbers of siblings, size of household, lone-parent levels, parent education, homeownership, and overcrowding. But migration histories and the racial-ethnic composition of Canada and the United States are other factors. Although both countries are described historically as “White-settler” societies (referring to European settlement), the United States is distinctive. First, the extensive reliance on slave labour in the southern states created a large Black population and a history of race relations that perpetuated Black disadvantage after the 1865 abolition of slavery. Second, contested borders with Mexico resulted in the mid-nineteenth-century acquisition of Texas, California, and other southwestern areas, but annexation did not stop migratory flows. Indeed, the end of the Bracero program in 1964, which was designed to supply unskilled Mexican workers on temporary contracts, was followed in the 1970s and 1980s by high levels of undocumented (unauthorized) flows of population from Mexico to the United States. Consequently, compared to Canada, Black and Mexican origin populations constitute a larger share of the overall American population. In addition, past migration flows from Cuba, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, and Guatemala, along with migration from Puerto Rico, have enlarged the Hispanic (Latino) populations.

In contrast, Canada has a smaller Black population, representing less than 3 per cent in the 2006 census, and only a small population from Latin America (the 2006 Canadian Census reports fewer than 50,000 permanent residents in Canada who were born in Mexico). Following immigration policy changes in the 1960s and 1970s, immigrants to Canada now primarily come from Asian countries, particularly South Asia, China, and the Philippines. In the aftermath of the Vietnam War, migration from Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and Sri Lanka added to the Southeast Asian populations in both Canada and the United States.

As a result of these migration trends, the children in immigrant families are racially and ethnically diverse, although the composition differs for Canada and the United States. Table 8.2 shows the country-specific racial composition of immigrant children. The data derive from responses to the visible minority question in the 2006 Canadian census and to the race and Hispanic questions in the United States ACS; selection of categories for the United States is shaped by American research that combines information on Hispanic origins with information on race to distinguish between non-Hispanic White, White Hispanic, and Black Hispanic. (Multiple responses to the race question have been permitted since 2000 in the United States). For Canada, data in Table 8.2 are for those immigrant children who are legal permanent residents, but such refinements are not possible for US data that include immigrant children (or their parents) who are temporary and/or unauthorized residents.

In Canada, almost all children (97 per cent) in native-born families are not visible minorities.⁵ For the United States, seven out of ten (71 per cent) children in native-born families are non-Hispanic Whites; the smaller percentage reflects the larger population share of children in Black families and in Mexican White or other Hispanic families. However, this “majority White” composition for children in native-born families is reversed for children in immigrant families. Only two in ten immigrant children in the United States are non-Hispanic White; in Canada, four out of ten immigrant children are non-visible minorities (Table 8.2). Arabs and West Asians are considered “White” in classifications used by the United States; if children in these categories are added to the non-visible minority category for Canadian immigrant children, the non-visible minority population rises to 45 per cent of the total.

For immigrant children, the impacts of migration from Mexico and other Latin American regions are evident in the United States, where nearly one in five (22 per cent) immigrant children are Mexican White and nearly one third are other Hispanic, both White and non-White. In total, over half of the children residing in immigrant families in the US are enumerated as Hispanic. By way of contrast, in Canada, Latin Americans represent only 3 per cent of all immigrant children, while over one quarter are members of either the South Asian visible minority (17.4 per cent) or the Chinese visible minority (10.9 per cent).

Table 8.2. Children aged 0–14^(a) living in immigrant and in Canadian- or USA-born families, by race and/or Hispanic status

	Canada 2006 ^(b)		USA, 2005–07 ^(c)	
	Immigrant families	Canadian-born families	Immigrant families	Native-born families
Visible minority status of child	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Black	9.9	1.5	7.5	15.9
Chinese	10.9	0.7	3.0	0.2
Korean	1.5	(e)	1.3	0.1
Japanese	0.5	0.2	0.4	0.1
Filipino	5.0	0.1	2.3	0.1
South Asian	17.4	0.3	4.0	(e)
Southeast Asian	3.1	0.1	3.0	0.1
Visible Minority, NIE	0.7	0.1	4.9	2.6
Multiple visible minorities	2.3	0.2	24.7	4.7
Latin American	3.3	0.1	21.7	3.5
Arab	4.0	0.1	6.8	2.0
West Asian	1.8	(e)		
Not a visible minority ^(d)	39.8	96.6	20.3	70.9

(a) Excludes persons of Aboriginal origins in Canada and persons declaring American Indian or Alaskan Native to the race question in the American Community Surveys.

(b) Excludes non-permanent residents.

(c) Includes non-permanent residents and persons with unauthorized status.

(d) Includes White only, White & Latin American, White & Arab, and White & West Asian.

(e) Less than 0.05 per cent.

Source: Special tabulations produced for this chapter from the RDC 2006 Canadian census file and from the 2005–07 American Community Surveys.

In his analysis of the 2000 US census, Hernandez (2004; also see UNICEF Innocenti Insight 2004) documents that “risk” factors for immigrant children vary by origin. Even though research demonstrates that immigrant children are remarkably resilient to factors that may negatively affect well-being, particularly mental health, and often over-excel in educational attainment relative to their parents (Fuligni 1998; Georgiades et al. 2011), some groups may face greater challenges because low socio-economic status, frequently associated with country of origin, means that these children grow up in linguistically isolated, lone-parent, crowded, and poor households and families (Han 2006).

Table 8.3 shows the prevalence of these four indicators for immigrant children by race and/or Hispanic status. (Arab and West Asian are included with White for Canada, so as to mirror the United States classification). Although profiles could be individually composed for each racial and/or Hispanic group in Canada and the United States, for simplicity an average, or composite, measure is constructed to suggest which groups of minority immigrant children might be more challenged during their developmental years. This average, of course, is dependent on the components; some groups have a high average (and high ranking) because they have high percentages living in lone-parent families or because they are more likely to be living in linguistically isolated families or because their families are below poverty thresholds. “Type I” thresholds for poverty are used (see Table 8.3) because in Canada LICOs after taxes is the measure preferred by Statistics Canada, and the absolute poverty rate, discussed earlier, remains an official measure produced by the US Census Bureau.

Averages show that White immigrant children in both countries have the lowest averages of living in potentially problematic circumstances compared to children of other racial backgrounds. In Canada, the average indicator is highest for Korean, Black, Latin American, and Southeast Asian immigrant children, representing one in five immigrant children (18 per cent) age 0–14. The Korean rank reflects the large percentage of children living in families where no adult age fourteen and older is using English and/or French in the home, as well as the high percentage living in households below the LICO threshold after taxes (Table 8.3). A high percentage of Black children are also in households below the LICO poverty threshold; however, relative to other groups, only 6 per cent of Black children live in linguistically isolated homes. Their high composite average reflects the

Table 8.3 Select characteristics for children age 0-14 living in immigrant and native-born families in Canada and in the United States, by race and Hispanic status

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
	<i>Linguistically isolated</i>	<i>Lone parent</i>	<i>Over-crowded</i>	<i>Poverty threshold type I^(a)</i>	<i>Poverty threshold type II^(b)</i>	<i>Average, col 1 thru col 4</i>	<i>Rank</i>
CANADA							
Immigrant families ^(c)							
Black	6	38	18	34	43	24	9
Chinese	35	11	12	23	29	20	5
Korean	38	9	14	39	47	25	10
Japanese	14	8	7	16	21	11	2
Filipino	8	11	22	11	16	13	3
South Asian	28	6	25	23	30	20	6
South-East Asian	30	21	16	25	33	23	7
Other (Multiple and NIE)	8	17	12	19	25	14	4
Latin American	22	24	16	30	40	23	8
White ^(d)	10	9	8	15	20	10	1
Canadian-born families	(h)	20	2	9	13	8	(na)
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA							
Immigrant families ^(c)							
Black	13	36	22	22	48	23	8
Chinese	37	10	17	12	27	19	5
Korean	42	11	15	12	31	20	7

Table 8.3 Select characteristics for children age 0–14 living in immigrant and native-born families in Canada and in the United States, by race and Hispanic status (Continued)

	Linguistically isolated (1)	Lone parent (2)	Over-crowded (3)	Poverty threshold type I ^(a) (4)	Poverty threshold type II ^(b) (5)	Average, col 1 thru col 4 (6)	Rank (7)
Japanese	47	6	16	9	22	20	6
Filipino	12	16	23	5	20	14	4
South Asian	14	7	20	10	25	13	3
South East Asian	38	22	28	21	47	27	10
All other Asian Non-Hispanic ^(f)	9	15	14	10	29	12	2
All other non-white Hispanic ^(g)	39	28	39	30	66	34	11
Mexican white	47	24	43	35	73	37	12
Other Hispanic white	34	28	23	20	50	26	9
White, Non-Hispanic	9	11	11	10	26	10	1
USA Born Families	1	35	8	17	37	15	(na)

(a) Type I refers to the LICO line after tax transfers in Canada and to the absolute poverty measure in the USA.

(b) Type II refers to the LICO line before tax transfers in Canada and to being 200 per cent above the absolute poverty line in the USA.

(c) Children with legal permanent residence status.

(d) Includes White only, Arab only, West Asian only, White & Latin American, White & Arab, and White & West Asian groups.

(e) Includes children with legal permanent resident status, unauthorized and temporary status

(f) Consists of all other non-Hispanic responses including Asian and multiple race.

(g) Consists of all other non-White Hispanic including Black, Chinese, etc., and multiple responses.

(h) Less than 0.5 percent.

(na) Not applicable.

Source: Special tabulations produced for this chapter from the RDC 2006 Canadian census file and from the 2005–07 American Community Surveys.

very high percentage (38 per cent) living in lone-parent families. Averages for Southeast Asian and Latin American children reflect all four factors – both groups have at least one in four living in linguistically isolated households and at least one in four living with lone parents. One-quarter of Southeast Asian children and nearly one-third (30 per cent) of Latin American children live in families where after-tax incomes are below Statistics Canada's Low Income Cut-Offs.

In the United States, Hispanic children are among the groups with high averages, or rankings, as are Black and Southeast Asian immigrant children. Mexican White children and non-White Hispanic children are especially at risk of growing up in circumstances that may negatively influence their social, emotional, and cognitive development. As shown in Table 8.3, they have high percentages living in linguistically isolated families, in overcrowded conditions, and in families that are below the absolute poverty line; between two-thirds to three quarters of these children are below poverty thresholds defined as twice the absolute poverty line. Over one-third of other Hispanic White children also live in linguistically isolated families where persons aged fourteen and older use a non-English language in the home and cannot speak English very well. Approximately one in three of these other Hispanic (non-Mexican) White children also are living in lone-parent families.

As is the case in Canada, Southeast Asian and Black immigrant children in the United States are also higher than other groups in their composite scores. Nearly 40 per cent of Southeast Asian children live in linguistically isolated families and the percentages living in lone-parent families are comparable to those observed for Mexican White children. As also found in Canada, a relatively lower percentage of Black immigrant children in the United States live in linguistically isolated settings, but over one-third of these children are living in lone-parent families. Approximately one-fifth of Southeast Asian and Black children are living in families with income below the absolute poverty threshold.

Combined, the population of Hispanic, Black, and Southeast Asian children in the United States represents two-thirds (64 per cent) of children in immigrant families. If Blacks are omitted to reduce the comparisons to four groups, equalling the number for Canada, the higher averages would describe over half (56 per cent) of the immigrant children population. Overall, country differences in other

proximal factors (Table 8.1) and the higher prevalence of unauthorized migrants suggest immigrant children in the United States may indeed face potentially greater challenges to social, cognitive, and scholastic development than those living in Canada.

CONCLUSIONS AND NEW DIRECTIONS

Data presented in this chapter show that Canadian children in immigrant families overall are more likely than immigrant children in the United States to live in large metropolitan areas, to be slightly older, and to have fewer siblings, smaller households, lower percentages living with lone parents, lower percentages living in rented or overcrowded housing, higher percentages of university-educated parents, and higher percentages of employed mothers (Table 8.1). However, in both countries, comparisons of the characteristics of children in immigrant families to those of native-born families reach similar conclusions: immigrant children have lower percentages living in lone-parent families and they are more concentrated in large cities such as Toronto and Vancouver or New York–New Jersey and Los Angeles–Long Beach. Compared to children in native-born families, they have more siblings, live in larger households, have relatively high percentages living in linguistically isolated families, have higher percentages living in overcrowded accommodations and in rental housing, are less likely to have parents employed, and are more likely to live in families where income is below poverty thresholds. Furthermore, using a limited range of indicators (Table 8.3), such situations are enhanced for Korean, Black, Latin American, and Southeast Asian immigrant children in Canada and for immigrant Mexican White, Black Hispanic, other Hispanic, Black, and Southeast Asian children in the United States.

These characteristics are relevant for specific investigations into various components of childhood development and well-being, for ongoing policies targeting immigrant children, and for future research topics. First, as indicated in the earlier review, many characteristics are associated with, and act as proximal factors for, difficulties in cognitive and social development, limited success in school, and ultimately problems in how youth transition to adulthood. Results thus underscore the importance of continuing and expanding in-depth investigations on topics such as the early childhood development of immigrant children, including the impacts of linguistic isolation, and

the verbal, reading, and math literacy levels and progress of immigrant children in school.

Second, although census data do not directly speak to policy initiatives, a number of policy suggestions targeting children rest on these data: how are children in non-English (and non-French for Canada) families faring in school; how can hardships associated with poverty and overcrowding be ameliorated; how can local communities (and states and provinces) build and offer infrastructures to assist children and parents in immigrant families (Capps and Fortuny 2006); how can ESL and ELD (English literacy development) programs be designed to assist non-English language learners and/or those in linguistically isolated families (Crowe 2006)? Should preschool education be available to all low-income immigrant children in order to improve their language and math readiness, and facilitate parental involvement early on (Haskins and Tienda 2011)? And, in the United States, what are the policy levers for helping children who live in families where they, and/or other members, may be unauthorized? Among the suggestions are removing lengthy wait times in family reunification that create incentives for unauthorized migration (Landale et al. 2011), and dismantling barriers, often in the form of local, state, and federal legislation, that dampen or ban access to supports and services required by those children who live with unauthorized family members (Shields and Behrman 2004).

In addition, the focus of this chapter on the characteristics of children in immigrant families represents a simplified portrait of what are undoubtedly more complex environments faced by immigrant children. As other researchers note (Glick 2010; Hernandez et al. 2009, 2010), many of the characteristics of children in immigrant families (and in native-born families as well) are bundled; immigrant children living in linguistically isolated families also live in poor families, with parents who lack university education, with one or more parents who may not be employed, in rental housing, in accommodations shared by many family members, in overcrowded housing. A next research step is to determine which characteristics most likely are combined and what groups of immigrant children are most prone to living in these multi-indicator environments.

Findings in this chapter also raise an intriguing question that requires further study: are immigrant children in the United States more likely than those in Canada to grow up in families characterized by proximal factors that can create challenges in cognitive,

social, and academic development, and if this is so, why? First steps involve harmonizing measures of proximal factors, including language proficiency and usage and family income, and assessing the prevalence of multiple factors. To sharpen the country comparisons, racial categories also need to be refined in future studies, particularly for categories such as Black, Southeast Asian, Asian, and Other Hispanic.

In addition, examining the population of children who are likely to be unauthorized or have family members who are unauthorized will be an important research topic in the future, not only for immigrant children in the US but also for those in Canada. Several terms are used to describe unauthorized migrants, the most common being “undocumented” or “illegal”; modes of entry also vary. Some may have slipped across borders without authorization or paperwork while others may have overstayed the expiration of their temporary visas. According to United States estimates (Passel 2011), over eleven million undocumented migrants, representing 28 per cent of the foreign-born population, exist, of which Mexicans are the largest group. If Canada had the same percentages, undocumented migrants would number over two million as of 2011; however, guesstimates are lower, usually between 20,000 and 500,000 (Magalhaes et al. 2010). But numbers are likely to grow with two new policy changes. First, in order to meet labour shortages and increase flexibility, the Canadian government is admitting more temporary workers; nearly 500,000 entered in 2012, up from fewer than 200,000 in 2000. Second, new regulations effective 1 April 2011 impose a four-year work limit on many temporary workers with the expectation that such workers will return home for another four years before they become eligible again. On 1 April 2015, the four-year period for the earliest cohort of workers under these new regulations ended. The major question is whether such workers will leave Canada or remain as over-stayers. If the latter occurs, Canada’s undocumented population could sharply increase.

Undocumented migration affects families and children in several ways. First, it is wrong to think that an undocumented worker produces only undocumented families and children; the impact is more extensive. In the US, the long wait lines for family reunification admission have produced “mixed status” families, where one or more members have legal resident visas or even US citizenship but where other relatives circumvent the wait lines by becoming

undocumented. As well, the gradual transformation from temporary sojourner to stayer can be accompanied by the development of romantic attachments to persons legally in the US or Canada and by the establishments of families that may produce native-born offspring who hold legal citizenship.

That said, the presence of one or more undocumented parents can create difficulties for their children. Precarious immigration status often means precarious employment for adult workers, including erratic employment, low wages, tenuous or non-existent worker rights, and unsafe working conditions (Goldring and Landolt 2012). For children and adults alike, increased poverty risks also may be accompanied by limited or non-existent access to health care, to subsidized housing, and to schooling because of documentation requirements (Magalhaes et al. 2010; Passel 2011; Yoshikawa and Kholoptseva 2013). In their review Yoshikawa and Kholoptseva (2013) suggest that the psychological distress and economic hardship experienced by undocumented parents are associated with lower cognitive skills in early childhood and lower levels of emotional well-being for young children and adolescents. Other sources of stress that diminish child well-being include parental removal from the home and detention by the authorities.

Research on how the development of children is affected by having one or more undocumented parents is still in its infancy, hampered in part by difficulties in obtaining data on a segment of the immigrant population that may fear visibility. However, the relationships between parental (il)legal status and subsequent indicators of well-being for their children are promising avenues of future research, particularly since almost one-third of immigrant children in the US have one or more unauthorized parents, and undocumented workers and mixed-status families in Canada are likely to increase as a result of recent policy changes.

NOTES

- 1 We use the term “immigrant children” in this chapter interchangeably with “children of immigrants” and “children of immigrant families.” However, the general use of the term “immigrant” itself is a misnomer if admissions criteria are invoked. While it is true that children or their

- parents have “in-migrated,” not everyone is a legal permanent resident. Some are admitted temporarily and others are in the destination country as unauthorized or undocumented migrants.
- 2 “Native-born” is a term used in American research; it is not an expression used in Canada, as it competes with the term “native peoples.” However, to enable international comparison, we use it in this chapter.
 - 3 Additionally, studies tracing children over time and/or targeting children at specific stages of development point to the dynamics of family interaction styles as affecting child development, child behaviours, and health.
 - 4 Dimensions of family structure not examined here include the presence of grandparents or other adult members of a household (Clark, Glick, and Bures 2009), and cohabiting versus legally married parents (Landale, Thomas, and Van Hook 2001).
 - 5 “Visible minority” is a socially constructed Canadian term devised in the 1980s to collect data under the mandate of the 1986 Employment Equity Act. Visible minorities are defined as persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-White in colour. Categories in the visible minority population variable include Chinese, South Asian, Black, Filipino, Latin American, Southeast Asian, Arab, West Asian, Korean, Japanese, Visible minority n.i.e. (not included elsewhere), Multiple visible minority, and Not a visible minority.

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