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Procedural precarity: An examination of Canadian immigration policy and practice in relation to immigrant youth

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Abstract: *All newcomers, regardless of age, face a compounded variety of barriers, risks and challenges that are exacerbated by their immigrant status. However, newcomer youths face some of these same issues with heightened vulnerability, often with a lower level of visibility or opportunity to reap the benefits bestowed by immigration policies or federally-funded programming. The Centre for Newcomers, an immigrant-serving organisation that has for more than 30 years been providing services to Calgarian newcomers, has identified several substantial gaps within these parameters. This article explores some of the most pressing gaps in Canadian immigration policy in relation to the following inter-connected and fundamental issues facing newcomer youth in Canada: protracted and ongoing status issues; educational barriers; and poverty. The article then contextualises these policy gaps with reference to CFN's Real Me programme, which has recently been recognised as a best practice by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, to provide evidence- and practice-based policy recommendations.*

Keywords: *Canada; youth; immigration; Centre for Newcomers; Real Me; gaps; poverty; education; Calgary*

1 Introduction

All newcomers, regardless of age, face a compounded variety of barriers, risks and challenges that are exacerbated by their immigrant status. However, newcomer youths may face these same issues with heightened vulnerability, even within the context of Canada. Studies suggest that vulnerabilities among newcomers are determined by absolute or relative

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material/emotional deprivations or their inability to utilise their assets due to existing economic, social, cultural and political constraints (Alysa-Lastra & Cachon 2015). However, many of the federally and provincially-funded programmes in Canada have been designed to address these compounding effects in respect to newcomer adults. When the lens is refocused upon immigrant youth, it becomes apparent that these vulnerabilities, combined with systemic issues surrounding racism, social exclusion, isolation and poverty, have increasingly long-lasting and dramatic effects, manifesting in heightened marginalisation, disenchantment and feelings of a lack of belonging within the Canadian environment (Cooper & Cooper 2008; Berns-McGown 2013).

Nonetheless, Canada is considered a desirable destination country for immigrants and refugees alike and, for these reasons, the multi-faceted and decentralised nature of the Canadian immigration policy may be perceived as both a blessing and a curse. For example, provincial governments are able to 'nominate' immigrants through express entry streams; citizens are able to privately sponsor refugees outside of government sponsorship; and individuals/employers can apply for temporary-foreign worker permits (Government of Canada 2020A). However, each type of immigration application, therefore, can be processed through a variety of different vetting systems and institutional or governing bodies, resulting in a plethora of opportunities for approval or, conversely, equally as many chances to fall through the cracks of bureaucracy (Falconer 2019A).

Regardless of Canada being lauded as a champion of 'multiculturalism', particularly since the 1971 'Multiculturalism Policy', issues relating to integration and assistance for immigrant youth still run counter to this narrative. In fact, some have argued that this pivot was 'largely a symbolic recognition of diversity rather than a substantive change in government policy' (Li 1999: 152) and, ultimately, this cognitive dissonance has sowed the seeds for Canadian immigration policies to date. This is evident in the current and federally-mandated Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) plan, which is projected to welcome approximately one million new permanent residents to Canada between 2020 and 2022, with the unsurprising focus being primarily upon economic stream immigrants, with importance of reuniting families and upholding Canada's humanitarian tradition as corollary (Government of Canada 2020B).

With this legislated adherence to the economic viability of newcomers, it is not surprising that there is a lack of focus upon provisional supports to dependants of economic stream immigrants. However, given that currently we are in the wake of the refugee crises, where almost 71 million persons are displaced and more than half of all refugees are under 18 years of age (UNHCR 2020), a vested interest in programming for newcomer youths is even more crucial. This need is further underscored in the Canadian

context as Canada is known to be one of the highest receiving countries of resettled refugees from the UNHCR (Falconer 2019B). Moreover,

> in 2016, close to 2,2 million children under the age of 15, or 37.5% of the total population of children had at least one foreign-born parent … and children with an immigrant background could represent between 39% and 49% of the total population of children in 2036 (StatCan 2017A).

Therefore, it is imperative for the immigrant youths of today, as well as those of the future, that Canadian politicians and policy makers, as well as other stakeholders, re-centre the needs of both refugee and immigrant youth within their policies and practices.

Calgary, a city in the province of Alberta, has steadily gained popularity as resettlement destination for newcomers and their families in recent years. According to StatCan, 'over the past 15 years, the share of immigrants in the Prairie provinces has more than doubled. The percentage of new immigrants living in Alberta rose from 6.9% in 2001 to 17.1% in 2016, a higher share than in British Columbia' (StatCan 2017B). Further, as of the most recent Canadian census, just over 28 per cent of Calgarians are foreign-born, with 33,7 per cent belonging to visible minority groups (Calgary Economic Development 2020), with just over 640 000 identifying as immigrants under the age of 19 (LIPdata 2020).

For all of these reasons, the purpose of this article is to explore the procedural pitfalls of Canadian immigration policy in relation to youth. While the scope of data will rely upon Canadian data, and utilise best-practice examples from the Calgary-specific programming of the Centre for Newcomers (CFN), these learnings may be applicable to immigration policies beyond the confines of the Canadian context. That said, the three most fundamental and interconnected gaps that will be developed are the following: protracted and ongoing status issues; educational barriers; and poverty.

Each of these barriers falls within the social determinants of health framework, by which marginalised groups, including newcomers, are more likely to be affected by than their Canadian-born counterparts (Mikkonen & Raphael 2010). Being impoverished, lacking equitable access to education, or facing barriers to services due to a precarious immigration status have tenable and exacerbating effects on a person's stress levels. This in turn can lead to compounding physical and mental health issues for anyone, but even more so for newcomer families and youths. Furthermore, each of these issues is critical to the overall development, health and well-being of immigrant youths and can be found within the scope of, and often at odds with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), particularly in the context of international migration (CMW/C/GC/3-CRC/C/GC/22; CMW/C/GC/4-CRC/C/GC/23). Due to the fact that Canada has been party to CRC for almost 30 years (Canada CRC 2019)

and prides itself on being a nation built on diversity, a renewed focus on the rights of immigrant youths is urgently required.

Thus, in August 2014 CFN, the University of Calgary and other community partners created a collaborative intervention programme called Real Me, for immigrant youths between the ages of 12 and 24 in Calgary. Real Me was the first programme of its kind in Canada, as it targeted immigrant youths who were disproportionately at risk of gang involvement or ideation through an Identity-Based Wraparound Intervention (IBWI) model. The IBWI methodology may be attributed to more than a decade of work led by Hieu van Ngo, an associate professor in the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Calgary. Van Ngo's pioneering research highlighted the linkages between crises in identity development for immigrant youth and their subsequent susceptibility towards gang-related behaviours in Canada. His work refocused the centrality of relational accountability for participants, families and the broader community within an ecological and culturally competent support system. This type of multi-stakeholder accountability was considered crucial, as Real Me participants were consistently known (and continue to do so) to have experienced obstacles in 'accessing services and support in the social services, education and justice arenas' (Dunbar 2017: 13). Since its inception Real Me has directly serviced 311 youths.

While the Real Me programme continues to focus on the most vulnerable, low-income and at-risk immigrant youth populations in Calgary, research suggests that investing in youths, particularly those that are considered the most disadvantaged, will have the highest return on investment (Sylva et al 2004; Heckman 2006; Rees, Chai & Anthony 2012). Furthermore, focusing on youths that are considered the most vulnerable has been seen to have positive impacts for ***all youths*** (Toczydlowska & D'Costa 2017). Therefore, this article will utilise some evidence and practice-based learnings gleaned from CFN's 30-year background with newcomer populations in Calgary, coupled with their experience in the facilitation of the Real Me programme, to address ongoing policy and practice issues and provide recommendations that have the potential to foster positive outcomes for immigrant youths beyond the Calgarian context.

It is crucial to highlight the resiliency and ability of young immigrants; it is equally important to demystify the compounded effects of degenerative politics, and procedural precarities they may face. Ultimately, even though immigrant youths are assumed to have a higher capacity and speed in their integration processes than their adult counterparts, ample supports to enable this process remain absent.

2 Protracted/ongoing immigration issues

The issues currently surrounding the immigration status of youths often run parallel to the status of their parents and families. While 'family reunification' is considered the second of the three fundamental grounds for admission to Canada (StatCan 2017B) the budget for the Family Reunification and Discretionary Immigration programme has seen demonstrable cuts over the years due to its 'costly' nature (IRCC 2018; Government of Canada 2015). In terms of logistical eligibility, the very concept of 'family reunification' is marked by a number of legal qualifiers, such as definitive proof of marriage, or familial relation, which in themselves are documents that may be difficult for potential immigrants to obtain. Furthermore, in order for a child to fall under the jurisdiction of reunification, they must be within the age bracket that indiscriminately renders them a dependent; otherwise immigrant youths would have to apply for immigrant status separately, potentially rendering the immigration claim of a non-dependant youth into precarity.

However, who is considered a 'youth', a 'child' or a 'dependent' is highly inconsistent, as international conventions and domestic immigration law, as well as linguistic volatility, can hold enormous weight. While CRC defines a 'child' as an individual under the age of 18, a 'youth' or 'child' has a more reflexive definition in the context of Canadian migration policy. Prior to 2017 there was a period when the age cut-off for a child or youth who was considered a 'dependant' was ***lowered*** to 'under 19' (Bender 2014). While this issue was particularly daunting for refugee claimants, who were subjected to lengthy delays or processing times and wished to reunify with their families in Canada, the tremors of this impact could also be felt by those who were applying for family reunification through economic or family class migratory streams. Many principal applicants, in any of these streams, had to face the possibility of having their children age out of the allocated age of dependency during processing periods which, in turn, would potentially compromise the possibility of the entirety of their family's reunification on Canadian soil. While the age cut-off for immigrant dependants has once again been raised to include youths who are 'under 22' (CCR 2017), the methods of Canadian immigration and refugee vetting may not be in stride with article 10 of CRC, which states that 'applications by a child of his or her parents to enter or leave a state party for the purpose of family reunification shall be dealt with by state parties in a positive, ***humane and expeditious manner***' (UNGA, 1989, article 10(1); emphasis added).

To add insult to injury, issues surrounding status and immigration class have ongoing detrimental outcomes for immigrant youths, as these policies exacerbate not only a youth's own individual precarity, but also that of their family. The psycho-social effects of familial estrangement

coupled with a loss of cultural identity may lead to heightened feelings of isolation for immigrants, and even more so for immigrant youth and by proxy, resulting in participation in gang activities. Studies relating to gang ideation have identified that the promotion of meaningful connections with peers, adults or family members can mitigate anti-social behaviours that may lead to future gang involvement (Rossiter & Rossiter 2009; Sersli, Salazar & Lozano 2010). However, when a youth (and their family) has a precarious immigration status, they may be less likely to develop meaningful relationships due to the notion that their residency has an expiry date. Additionally, unresolved status may also foster a tension or disconnect between identity and belonging to both the country of origin and its cultural leanings against those of their new-found homes. Without ample support to navigate such stressors, immigrant youths can find themselves even more at odds with their evolving transnational Canadian identity, their receiving communities and the institutional frameworks that accompany it. These challenges may only be exacerbated by the declining intergenerational relationships when the number of successful family reunifications has been reduced (Sheilds & Lujan 2018: 4). Lastly, researchers have found that immigrant youths with unstable families are 'less likely to prosper scholastically and are more likely to become delinquent' (Beiser, Shik & Curyk 1999).

From CFN's Real Me programme as well as other youth-related data, we have found that there is a substantial gap regarding services to youths who remain permanent residents beyond the federally-funded landing threshold (which is capped at three years, typically). Our data suggests that more than 60 per cent of participants in the Real Me programme have outstanding issues regarding the immigrant status of family members. In fact, many of the participants of the Real Me programme, along with their families, have no status, have lost their status or have for protracted periods been permanent residents, rendering them no longer eligible to access federally-funded support services. Fortunately, the funding streams attributed to Real Me are not required to follow the same regulations, as the programme is not dependent upon federal funds. However, this solidifies the assumption that protracted immigration issues are salient among immigrant communities in Calgary and Canada, on the whole; pointing towards a federal funding blind-spot regarding those with heightened vulnerabilities due to their longstanding undetermined immigration status.

Thus, while decentralisation and multiple avenues for migration are available, the inconsistency in eligibility criteria and governance creates an accountability vacuum – thrusting immigrants and refugees into precarity. This type of inconsistency and decentralisation is evident at all levels of the immigration process, even within the innocuous semantics of who is considered to be a 'child'. For example, the multiple governing bodies overseeing the migratory and asylum processes in Canada, such

as Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, the Immigration and Refugee Board and the Canada Border Services Agency, maintain seemingly ever-changing involvement in the intake, approval, triaging and appeal processes (Falconer 2019A). This convoluted division of labour is mirrored in the ways in which international, federal, provincial and municipal legislative responsibilities to immigrants are applied in Canada.

3 Educational barriers

Education poses yet another barrier for immigrant youths in Canada and has far-reaching implications for future integration and belonging in the Canadian context. While the general right to childhood education is enshrined in article 28 of CRC, many of its caveats are not met at the necessary level of immediacy. It has been widely reported that at the international level, educational rights for children are followed with the least degree of dedication and often are the first to lose their financial backing (HRW 2016; Global Education Monitoring Report Team 2011). These sentiments manifest upon Canadian soil as well, as domestic English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) programming capacities, where the majority of students with immigrant backgrounds are placed, are often chronically under-resourced (Shields et al 2019). Further, there have been numerous studies indicating that newcomer youths, particularly those who belong to visible minority groups, often are put into grades or language classes that are well below their educational capacity (Bedri, Chatterjee & Cortez 2009; Baffoe 2011; Taylor & Krahn 2013), with notable implications for educational completion. Even in the context of Calgary, approximately 74 per cent of students attending ESL classes did not complete high school or earn a diploma (Watt & Roessingh 1994).

The lack of operationality and cohesive commitment to education for immigrant youths in provincial legislation was further underscored in Bejan and Sidhu's 2010 study of the Toronto Catholic District School Board. There was found to be not only a lack of dedication to CRC calls regarding indiscriminate education, but also a marked inconsistency with article 49.1 of the Ontario Ministry of Education Act (Ontario Ministry of Education 1990), which reiterated the universal right to education for all children, regardless of immigration status. In fact, Bejan and Sidhu found that

> only 31 schools (15.4%) indicated that they would enrol a child who lacked immigration status, 57 schools (28.4%) completely denied admission for non-status children and 113 schools (56.2%) did not know if a child without immigration status could be registered at their school (Bejan & Sidhu 2010: 1).

Another 13 schools alluded that all non-status students would have to pay an additional fee to access education, similar to international students.

However, since this fee was relatively high, at $10 000 to $12 000 per annum, it would effectively bar newcomer children without residency status from schooling (Bejan & Sidhu 2010: 12).

This lack of dedication to the educational rights of immigrant youths can be doubly damning. Newcomer youths not only are given less opportunity to academically excel, but they are also subjected to the more insidious, compounding effects that may have long-term detrimental outcomes to their self-confidence and self-actualisation. Practices that denigrate the academic ability of newcomer (and refugee) children reinforce negative conceptions of self-worth, creating a feedback loop which is only exacerbated by discriminatory behaviour on behalf of other Canadian-born students, teachers and also the broader Canadian context. However, this sense of estrangement within scholastics is not only applicable to youths who have their abilities consistently downplayed. Studies have shown that some newcomer youths who are given the opportunity to participate in programming at an age-appropriate grade level have also experienced feelings of alienation within Canadian pedagogy. Immigrant students namely have posited that the Eurocentric curricula and exercises often largely exclude the contributions and histories of minority groups – not only in the context of Canadian colonialist narratives, but also those of the international stage (Li 2009; Kayaalp 2014).

Data gleaned from CFN's Real Me programme evaluation further demonstrates the gaps that exist between other highly vulnerable, at-risk immigrant youths and their educational attainment. This is demonstrable through the fact that educational needs were reported as the primary purpose of contact in the general logs, with more than 1 800 claims (Gyun Cooper Research Associates Ltd 2018: 20) during the first five years of the programme. While schools were initially sceptical about working collaboratively with the Real Me practitioners to ease participants' navigation in education, the positive impact of the IBWI methods on education was most often mentioned (Gyun Cooper Research Associates Ltd 2018: 42). However, the participants' self-evaluation commentary yielded conflicting data points. Many participants became more aware of the discriminatory practices they had faced or were continuing to face in an academic setting and themselves posited little improvement within their own educational abilities (Gyun Cooper Research Associates Ltd 2018: 70). Thus, they reported a smaller improvement in their own educational progress than the progress reported by educational institutions/teachers as well as the Real Me practitioners. Additionally, through interviews with both participants and their families, it became apparent that supports necessary for success in the Calgarian education system were also lacking at the level of the family unit. Many families were not well-versed in how the education system worked, the specificities necessary for continued

learning at a post-secondary level, nor were they given the baseline knowledge to effectively advocate for themselves.

Ultimately, the educational experiences of immigrant youths may be understood as reflective of the experience of many adult immigrants with the Canadian labour market. Immigrant children and youths, much like their parents, are exposed to a system engrained with biases and, thus, have difficulty obtaining recognition of their skills or achievements. While there is policy-related and institutional virtue signalling towards educational and economic equity for newcomers, the means by which immigrant adults and youths are able to reach their potential often is overshadowed by discriminatory, ***laissez-faire*** practices. This once again is evident through the government of Alberta's Bill 11 (Fair Registration Practices Act). While other provinces already have in place similar legislation to remedy barriers to credential recognition, Alberta has yet to make Bill 11 actionable (Government of Alberta 2020). Much like issues borne out of cognitive dissonance between policy and practice in immigration status, education and employment-related policies could be better operationalised with an increased coordination and accountability between all levels of governance.

4 Poverty

As in the case of education, poverty has been identified as one of the most relevant indicators within the social determinants of the health framework. However, the concept of 'poverty' among newcomer families often serves as a marker of, or an amplifying factor to, other underlying issues or precarities, such as service accessibility, mental and physical health needs, language barriers and educational/professional credential recognition. In recent years there has been a substantial increase in evidence indicating that visible minorities have sizably lower economic returns than that of their Canadian-born, Caucasian counterparts (Li 1998; Pendakur & Pendakur 1996; Hou & Picot 2003; Turcotte 2019).

Since the late 1980s there have only been marginal increases in economic gain for recent newcomer populations on Canadian soil (Li 1988; Picot, Hou & Coulombe 2007; Evra & Kazemipur 2019). Calgary's data is consistent with this statement, as 17,3 per cent of people who have immigrated since 2011 are ***still*** living in poverty, accounting for more than 16 000 individuals (StatCan 2016). This percentage is almost a full 10 per cent higher than that of the non-immigrant Calgarian population (StatCan 2016). For newcomers that are under the age of 17, almost 26 per cent are considered to be living in low-income scenarios, which differs drastically from the 10,6 per cent of non-immigrant youths who are part of the same economic category (StatCan 2016). Ultimately, the poverty

rates associated with newcomer children and their families can only be understood as simply unacceptable in a country such as Canada.

Through the inconsistencies between the legal instruments that Canada has ratified and how they operate in practice, it once again is apparent that there are issues regarding the actionability of federal policies and international conventions, even in the vocabulary used. For instance, according to articles 18 and 27 of CRC Canada is legally bound to render 'appropriate assistance' to parents, to ensure healthy childhood development through institutional means as well as to ensure the right to provide material assistance and support programs within the realm of a child's development (UNGA 1989, article 18(2-3), article 27(3-4)). While the federal government does allocate funds to various settlement agencies, there is a significant gap in children's services in the context of federally-funded immigration programming, particularly within settlement providers that are considered to be the first contact points for newcomer populations. Furthermore, while this is a common trope within international legalese, what is deemed 'appropriate' or within the scope of Canadian 'national conditions and within their means' (UNGA 1989, article 27(3)) is arguably not met with consistent vigour, as the poverty levels among immigrant families and the lack of equitable credential recognition streams/programming embedded in the immigration policy demonstrates a lack of effective, or 'appropriate' measures to ensure that immigrant children are not impoverished.

However, 'appropriate' as a signifier is also used in a converse manner, which is identifiable via the accessibility of affordable child-minding for immigrant parents. According to the 2017 Early Childhood Education Report, many Canadian families have difficulties accessing affordable healthcare. While more than half (54 per cent) of children between the ages of two and four are able to attend some kind of accredited early childhood education programme, this does not take into account the variances in early childcare accessibility/affordability between Canada's provinces and territories (Akbari & McCuaig 2017). Further, this data is not disaggregated along the lines of immigration status. Within the context of CFN, these gaps are highlighted through a variety of means. First, in accordance with federal funding, only certain clients who meet programme-specific eligibility[1] criteria can access CFN's limited in-house child-minding services (38 openings). The majority of the places (34) are only available to individuals enrolled in CFN's language courses (LINC) and the remaining four are allocated as 'drop-in'. While the waiting list

1 Eligibility criteria for CFN's child-minding are as follows: (i) At least one parent must be enrolled in CFN's LINC programming – where Permanent Residency, and a CLB level under 4 is a requirement. (ii) The child care service hours must align with the hours/class schedule of the parent. (iii) The child enrolled must be between the ages of 19 months and 5 years.

for child-care is contingent upon scheduling and time slots of LINC programming (that is, morning, afternoon or evening); those needing child care during the least popular time slot are expected to be on the waiting list for at least one month. LINC students who are enrolled in the most popular time slots (part-time morning) typically face a six-month to one-year waiting list. Furthermore, once immigrants have passed LINC level 4, their ability to access federally-funded child care is waived, as this is considered an 'appropriate' level of language competence to enter the Canadian job market. Thus, newcomer parents have to reduce their language-learning or working hours to mind their children, ask their older children to take care of their siblings at the potential expense of their educational development or integration, or pay a portion of their wages to access childcare services, perpetuating the cycle of poverty. While childcare services were made to be more affordable ($25 per diem) to low-income families under Alberta's previous New Democratic Party (NDP) provincial governance, the capacity of these day care centres was consistently capped. This is expected to continue under the current United Conservative Party (UCP) provincial governance and funding for low-income and affordable child care is likely to be slashed in the next fiscal quarter (Hudes 2020).

The Community-Based Care for Newcomer Children (CBCNC) programme,[2] aimed at finding subsidised and affordable childcare services for the children of LINC students beyond the confines of CFN, reported that of the 57 day care centres with which they were affiliated in the past two years, only 22 fell into the $25 per diem category. Seven (all YMCA-affiliated) of these 22 were no longer accepting additions to their waiting lists, while another programme partner reported that their waiting lists were also capped, at 50 children for each available age cohort (19 months, 19 months to three years and three to five years old). Additionally, before the outbreak of COVID-19, the CBCNC waiting list stood at 36 children, due to a lack of funding. This is alarming due to the fact that referrals to this programme require that one should already have been on a waiting list through other LINC schools for three months. Through these examples it becomes apparent that 'appropriate' support to immigrant youths and their families through provincial and federal means cannot be construed as ample.

However, investments in youths, particularly those who are consistently seen as the most vulnerable, is of inherent import to the greater good of

2 Criteria for low-income child minding through the CBCNC programme is as follows: (1) Household income must be less than 50K (both parents, together). Proven by tax documents (line 150) or through calculation of all earnings from the time landed in Canada, providing pay stubs. (2) Both parents must be working, in school, or looking for work (which is only applicable for four months and all job applications must be proven). (3) One parent must have either a PR card or be citizen. PR paper, landing papers, conventional refugees are not accepted. (4) Children must be in attendance of the daycare for 100 hours every month to maintain subsidy funding. (5) At least one parent must have a language level of less than 4 CLB.

Canadian society. Numerous studies have been conducted that demonstrate that making investments in childhood developmental programmes and initiatives can have an enormous impact. For instance, according to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF):

> Alongside addressing family and community needs, public investments at an early stage of human development are justified on purely economic and social grounds due to expected wider benefits to individuals and society at large. In the context of developed countries, investments in children are often seen as the most cost-effective way to break the cycle of disadvantage and promote social mobility (European Commission 2013) or as a vehicle for strong and inclusive growth (OECD 2016) (Bruckauf & Cook 2017: 9).

Further, another UNICEF report explicitly indicated that

> tackling socio-economic inequalities experiences by migrant and refugee children has the potential to improve the position of all children as well as to reduce "bottom-end inequality" as this group is overrepresented in the lowest income decile. Migrant and refugee children are often affected by income inequality to a greater extent than other children/migration decisions affect the entire course of a child's life, which might be more positive on the whole depending on the child's access to education, labour market and health care and her or his overall wellbeing (Toczydlowska & D'Costa 2017: 6).

It is, thus, for the reasons of remedying outcomes for some of the most vulnerable immigrant youths that the Real Me programme was implemented. Real Me was explicitly tailored to the needs of Calgarian immigrant youths who were at the highest risk of gang-ideation, who were almost entirely from lower-income households and neighbourhoods. Additionally, CFN had previously created a bridging programme for the Real Me graduates to access, called the Youth Possibilities Project (YPP), which was funded by Service Canada. YPP aimed to increase employment opportunities and provide skill-building activities to break through cycles of poverty; effectively arming immigrant youths with the confidence to succeed in the Canadian labour market. However, similar to the fate of educational programming for immigrant youths, funding for this programme was inconsistent and lacked continuity.

5 Analysis of Real Me and discussion

Given the previous discussion on the topics of poverty, education and protracted immigration status, particularly when viewed through the social determinants of health framework, it is apparent that there is a need for more resources to be allocated towards immigrant youths. All these issues, coupled with the discriminatory practices and the subsequent lack of coordination, responsibility and actionability between all levels of governance, highlight the systemic pitfalls in procedural aspects of immigration policies. However, CFN's Real Me programme recently showcased as a 'promising practice' of how to earnestly work towards

practical, productive and effective outcomes for immigrant youths who are impoverished, face barriers to education and experience immigration issues in the Canadian context (Pathways to Prosperity 2020). The adaptability of Real Me in evolving alongside the needs and gaps identified by its participants underscores its transformative force for youths, their communities and policy on multiple levels, beyond the traditional scope of strict federal funding allocation.

Real Me's results were powerful for many reasons, beyond the explicit goal of reducing gang-ideation and criminal offences within its at-risk cohort. For all data points collected throughout the final evaluation documents, the employment of the identity-based wraparound intervention model may be understood as a key contributor to Real Me's success. The fundamental points of service embedded within the wraparound methodology were 'individualised intervention; positive mentorship; academic support; employment and skills support; pro-social activities; and support for family functioning' (Gyun Cooper Research Associate Ltd 2018: 3) which intentionally included educated and empowered multiple stakeholders in a participant's life, such as the family unit, teachers, justice officials, employers and mentors, to promote the positive development of high-risk immigrant youths through an ecological approach. Through the engagement of multiple actors, including those that are typically governed by municipal and provincial legislation, Real Me was able to permeate the silo of responsibility for immigration-related matters beyond their traditional scope. Further, through the buttressing of holistic, natural and individualised support models, which emphasised accountability as a relational and multi-faceted venture, participants were able to build their self-confidence through interpersonal and community-based means in a more organic fashion. Lastly, Real Me's success may be attributed to its quasi-experimental nature and diverse funding sources. Since the programme was not funded through typical federal streams, which have strict regulations regarding the immigration status or longevity of permanent residency, Real Me was able to work with those who have consistently fallen through the cracks embedded in Canadian immigration policy.

The Real Me programme and its evaluation also highlighted a number of other interesting areas, which could inform and improve future policy and its actionability. First, the IBWI methodology spurred a marked increase in positive family functioning (Gyun Cooper Research Associate Ltd 2018: 43, 55). While this should not be surprising due to the extensive family involvement that is embedded within Real Me and IBWI, it points towards the notion that shifting programming and policy to serve clients through an ecological model based upon coordinated and multi-stakeholder accountability can yield tremendous results for social cohesion. Second, through the incorporation of culturally-competent and

appropriate facilitators and mentors, Real Me participants were noted to have an improved sense of self-confidence. This is of particular importance as studies indicate that positive association with one's own cultural/ethnic identity has been proven to reduce depressive behaviour among immigrant youths (Nguyen, Jennine & Flora 2011). Thus, the emphasis on positive cultural and ethno-racial identity development within programming outcomes and intentionally staffing the programme with 'successful adult role models who were themselves integrated immigrants and members of ethno-racial minority groups' (Nguyen, Jennine & Flora 2011: viii) had measurable results (Nguyen, Jennine & Flora 2011: 47-49). Finally, as mentioned, needs relating to education were one of the highest mentions within Real Me's contact logs (Gyun Cooper Research Associate Ltd 2018: 24). However, there was a significant inconsistency between the reported improvement in educational attainment for immigrant youths on behalf of teachers and practitioners and self-reported educational improvements for the participants themselves. In fact, the majority of youth facilitators reported marked improvements in participants in the context of education, while only 22 per cent of programme completers indicated that they felt such improvements in their relationships to school (Gyun Cooper Research Associate Ltd 2018: 70). While there may be many variables leading to this discrepancy, the participants' increased understanding of engrained, systemic discriminatory practices embedded in the Canadian education system ought to be addressed procedurally (Gyun Cooper Research Associate Ltd 2018: 71).

In conclusion, while the Real Me programme was created for the specific needs of at-risk immigrant youths in Calgary, its techniques can be tailored to bridge the gaps that immigrant youths in other locales may face, in Canada and abroad. While adopting an IBWI methodology that honours an individual's cultural background and fosters an interpersonal vision of accountability is no easy task, it can provide a foundation for collaborative programming, practices as well as transformative policies.

6 Policy recommendations

Based on the research conducted for this article, in conjunction with findings sourced from CFN programming and the Real Me evaluation, a number of recommendations towards procedural policy and actionability improvements can be made.

Above all, it is necessary to rethink eligibility criteria for, and access to, services in Canadian immigration policies, particularly with reference to highly-vulnerable newcomers. A restructuring of this nature not only would reinforce the longstanding humanitarian sentiments embedded in federal immigration policies, but could also legitimise these underpinnings through intentionally providing services to those who face the most precarious

livelihoods. For example, allowing immigrants and refugees to access child care, settlement or employment services, regardless of immigration status/documentation, and/or ensuring that families experiencing highly-precarious living situations are able to access necessary support services for themselves, their families and their children, regardless of 'aging out' of the three-year, federally-mandated eligibility timeline, would reinforce alignment with CMW/C/GC/3-CRC/C/GC/22, paragraphs 6 & 18.

Second, increasing and coordinating the number of cultural, ethnic, linguistic and age-appropriate staff in the writing of federal immigration policy and programming would further increase alignment to both CRC (article 12) as well as the more recent General Comments highlighting the context of migration (CMW/C/GC/3-CRC/C/GC/22 & CMW/C/GC/4-CRC/C/GC/23). Additionally, increasing opportunities to meaningfully engage in skill-building workshops relating to culturally-diverse knowledges/practices/traditions for all individuals who may be affiliated with immigration, in both policy-writing and practice (that is, personnel in the fields of governance, medicine, education, justice and settlement) would further embed and actualise the concepts outlined in CRC, in the 2017 joint General Comments more meaningfully.

Third, it would be beneficial for the federal immigration policy to be reassessed in relation to the needs of immigrant youths, particularly through realignment with CRC (to which Canada has been a state party for just over 30 years) in addition to the joint General Comments mentioned above. For instance, ensuring that schools have ample funding and resources for ESL programming could be one of many potential routes towards establishing alignment with CMW/C/GC/3-CRC/C/GC/22 paragraph 18. Additionally, ensuring that schools are dedicated to providing education to every child, regardless of their own or their family's immigration status would fit the parameters outlined in CMW/C/GC/4-CRC/C/GC/23, paragraphs 59 & 62, in practice. Another means of aligning the procedural integration of these international instruments beyond the confines of policy could include a culturally-competent restructuring of pedagogy and curricula for the youth – which could prove to be proactive in negating future discriminatory or xenophobic ideation (CMW/C/GC/4-CRC/C/GC/23, paragraph 63). Furthermore, in accordance with article 10(1) of CRC, the promotion of a more cohesive, coordinated and appropriately-staffed immigration system to enforce 'expeditious' timelines for citizenship or migrant status (Falconer 2019A) could improve the likelihood of success in family reunification for those who have teenaged dependants. Building off this previous point, to maintain allegiance to the central theme of 'family unification' in the context of Canada's immigration policy – promoting programming that makes an explicitly holistic focus upon the entire family unit, rather than individuals – could also prove to be beneficial, as we have seen through the analysis of the Real Me programme. Lastly, a more

thorough investment, at all levels of government, in resources allocated towards credential recognition for all immigrants (CMW/C/GC/4-CRC/C/GC/23, paragraph 61), regardless of age, could provide fertile ground for newcomers to break through the cycles of poverty with greater ease.

Fourth, a concrete shift towards acknowledging the politicised nature of migration through the promotion of historically-aware research could lead to the production of more transformative immigration policies and practical operationalisation. Some ways in which this shift could occur are through an increased and ethically-minded effort to collect disaggregated data, especially for exceptionally vulnerable immigrant populations; increased investment in understanding the residual effects of cross-generational trauma on immigrants and their families; increased investment and concentration upon indigenous ways of knowing and decolonising methods, in the context of immigration; and in alignment with decolonial methods – creating, funding and applying recommendations of advisory groups made up of immigrants, refugees and youths that come from diverse backgrounds at all levels of policy and practice.

7 Conclusion

Given the fact that the number of immigrant youths is projected to increase over the coming years, revisions in policies relating to the youth and their subsequent operationality is required. In order for Canada to adequately and 'appropriately' portray itself as a champion of diversity and multiculturalism, the needs of immigrants, particularly immigrant youths, ought to be addressed more thoroughly at all levels of governance. However, the challenges that immigrant youths and families face may not be entirely contingent upon policy. Rather, the means by which immigration policies are operationalised, prioritised and embedded in Canadian collective consciousness also require a cognitive leap. While it is obvious that turning a blind eye to the needs of immigrant youths, particularly those that are highly vulnerable, exacerbates their precarity, developing practices that highlight relational accountability and foster community-centred ideals can be transformative. Ultimately, as long as immigration policies are understood as a 'federal construct' and provincial or municipal institutions do not actively engage or coordinate their policies, practices or resources to support newcomer youths, these gaps will continue to widen.

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