The Men's Toolbox

Tool for intervention

Working with Men from Immigrant Backgrounds

Goal

Present the specific ways to counsel and support men who are recent newcomers or later-generation immigrants.

1 Immigration to Quebec

Quebec is home to over 100 cultural communities, each of which has its particular characteristics.

In an intervention context, you need to be conscious of the biases of your own culture (roles, division of labour and status of men and women, etc.) and remember that Quebec values are the result of the recent evolution of our society and that they are not necessarily universal.

In many cultures, the man plays the role of provider and protector of his family. Although there are many reasons why a man may move to another country, improving his family's living conditions is often a motivation for migrating.

Recent immigrant

If the man is a newcomer, it is important to find out his immigration history (immigrant/refugee status, etc.) and integration experience as well as those of his family and friends to identify and prevent any current or previous barriers along his trajectory.

Established immigrant

If the man has been living in Quebec for a number of years, it is important to assess how well he has settled into his host society and to recognize his success factors and the hardships he has faced. For example, he may have had success in some areas (such as finding paid work) but less success in others, such as the social, cultural or family spheres.

- Understand his obstacles, e.g., barriers, value conflicts.
- Help the man define himself or make adjustments as a member of the global society, with his own cultural contribution.

2 Obstacles to integration: social and family barriers

- Isolation caused by a breakdown in existing social ties and a lack of connection with family members who remained in the country of origin.
- Increased responsibilities for both women and men due to a lack of the usual support system generally provided by the extended family or community.
- Difficulty adhering to Quebec social norms that refute male status as head of the family and male privileges, e.g., gender equality, valuing children's independence, youth protection system, etc.
- Weakening of the father's authority over the children, who often have a better command of the language and can integrate more quickly than their parents.

3 Barriers to employment

- Struggle to get school and professional qualifications recognized.
- Upgrading of professional skills to meet Quebec standards.
- Difficulty of integration into professional orders.
- Lack of knowledge of French and English.
- Lack of knowledge of standards or practices related to, for example, marketing or "selling" oneself, a very important skill when entering the job market but one that is considered inappropriate by some cultures.
- Possible normative conflicts (gender relations, religious practices, etc.).

4 Impact on health and well-being, which can lead to other problems

- Relative impoverishment due to lower standard of living compared to home country.
- Intense negative emotions: frustration, anger, misunderstanding, shame, disappointment, sense of worthlessness and powerlessness related to a loss of status.
- Anxiety to find work to support his immediate family and sometimes family members in his country of origin.
- Tension due to a reorganization of family roles.
- Questioning the migration project.
- Social and professional isolation.
- Questioning, even a loss of meaning, of his role and identity as a man.
- Resistance to change that can lead to withdrawal.
- Marital or family conflicts, e.g., separation, violence, litigation (civil or criminal), etc.
- Depression, self-destructive behaviour.

Main challenges

Working with men from immigrant backgrounds requires an attitude of openness to the other as a person and as a member of his community of origin. Here are some useful guidelines and tips.

5 First, remember the principles of intercultural intervention

- Admit your own lack of knowledge and let go of preconceptions.
- Recognize that two different worlds (in terms of values, language, role, etc.) will collide.
- Explore and seek to grasp the other person's belief system.
- Create a safe and welcoming space.
- Listen and support the man as he tries to find compromises that will help him better adjust to these changes.

6 During your sessions

- Avoid making presumptions about the man's experience: you actually don't know all the details of his life.
- Create a safe space to discuss taboo subjects that involve a threat to his masculine identity, for example, sexuality, relationships with his spouse or children, loss of work, etc.
- Ask questions to ensure you understand the man's reality and his concept of family, marital, social and professional roles.
- Value the various roles that he can play, especially as a father or spouse.
- Be open to his experience by allowing him to vent his emotions, whatever they may be and in whatever form they are expressed.
- Inform the man of the rules and norms of his host society; put them into perspective and explain their purpose; help him see how he can gradually adapt to them.

6 During your sessions (continued)

- Promote egalitarian relationships, for example, by asking the man how these could be positive for him or by helping him see the benefits he could get out of different interpersonal dynamics.
- During couple's or family counselling, avoid making the man feel excluded by ignoring or failing to consider his point of view.
- Consider that this man may have experienced discrimination (as many people are not yet open to cultural diversity) and even trauma such as war.
- Take care to use the man's own vocabulary and speak up to ask what his words mean rather than misinterpret them.
- Give him ideas about how to network professionally, culturally, socially, etc.
- Encourage him to strive toward his professional goals and guide him if this goal is not realistic or needs to be changed.
- Provide technical assistance or refer him to the best resources to prepare a resume, learn about Canadian employment standards, or even plan realistic short-, medium- and long-term goals.
- In the end, use the same principles of empathy, listening and humility that apply to all therapeutic relationships in order to interact with these men in a healthy way.

Learn more

- **Table de concertation des organismes au service des personnes réfugiées et immigrantes (in French)**

  tcri.qc.ca

  To learn more about organizations that work with refugees, immigrants and non-status persons in Quebec and get training to work with this clientele.

- **"Accompagner les pères immigrants" training from the Regroupement pour la valorisation de la paternité (in French)**

  www.rvpaternite.org/pappa-presentation/formation-et-accompagnement/

  To better understand the realities and needs of immigrant fathers and become better equipped to support and work with them.

- **2ll service**

  www.211qc.ca/en/immigration-and-cultural-communities

  For information about community, public and parapublic services in each region of Quebec that work in the area of immigration and cultural communities.

Consult all the toolbox tools

www.polesbeh.ca/en/documentation/mens-toolbox

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The Men's Toolbox

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