

Newcomers with Disabilities: Challenges & Service Implications

Course: LAPS/SOWK 4031

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Research Question

What are the challenges faced by immigrants and refugees with physical disabilities in Canada?

Abstract

On June 18, 2018 Canada changed the medical inadmissibility policy to be more welcoming of people with disabilities. To better understand the needs of this population, this project reviews the challenges faced by immigrants and refugees who have physical disabilities in Canada. Results suggest logistical, emotional, and community challenges, with implications for social work.

Method

A literature search was conducted in Social Services Abstracts, Scopus, Scholars Portal, Sociological Abstracts, PsycINFO, and Social Work Abstracts to find peer-reviewed journal articles about immigrants and refugees with physical disabilities in Canada. Challenges were categorized into themes and analyzed in terms of how they lend themselves to social work.

Results

Logistical/Adjustment

- Dependent on host family or sponsor for orientation to health care system
- Unaware of: funding not covered by OHIP and of wheelchair size possibilities
- Assisted Devices Program covers 3/4 of cost, and Interim Federal Health program does not help much with equipment
- No centralized service, so patients tell their stories to multiple professionals
- Doctors unwilling to consider patients' medical records from foreign countries

Psychological/Emotional

- Wild dreams eg hoping to be cured leads to unfulfilled expectations
 - result of Canada's global image
- Survivor's guilt (especially for those sent away first due to their vulnerability)
- Distrust, fear of government (from political instability in their home country and/or consciousness of Canadian xenophobia)
 - eg apprehensive when doctors ask for private information; worried it could affect their citizenship/status

Community Support-wise

- Parents are blamed by community for child's disability, so they are confined in the home to cope with stigmatization
- In school setting, parents' rights handbooks are in English and beyond basic reading skill
- Loss of extended family support
- Excluded from existing support groups which fail to meet their unique needs
- New forms of support here compared to home country (institutionalized rather than through relatives and neighbours)



Implications for Social Work

- Client-centred, self-determination
- Family-specific dialogue
- Home visits and therapy eg occupational therapy in their home
- Make parent/caregiver meetings, respite care
- Familiarize clients with human rights tribunal procedures eg for housing accessibility advocacy
- Advocate for in-person interpretation as opposed to remote if clients prefer to speak about their disabilities in person
- Demand that managers allow extra time to work with newcomers
- Join activist groups and movements eg Council for Canadians with Disabilities

