



# Migration and Young People's Mental Health in Canada: A Scoping Review

## Key Details

### KEY WORDS

Mental health, mental illness, immigration, newcomers, first generation, settlement experiences, literature review

### POPULATION GROUP

Newcomer youth

### STEPPING UP THEMES

Health & Wellness; Diversity, Social Inclusion & Safety

### RESEARCH ORIGIN

Ontario

### SOURCE

Academic

**“...findings from this review suggest that migrant youth who face discrimination, prejudice or racism are significantly more likely to experience higher levels of emotional problems and physical aggression. Studies on the pathways in which discrimination influences mental health among young migrants in the context of their everyday lives are needed to inform policy and practice.”**

### 1. What is the research about?

Mental health is a significant public health concern. To date, research findings related to the relationship between immigrant youth to Canada and mental health has been contradictory. Immigrant youth in Canada are underserved when it comes to their mental health needs. This research seeks to understand the range of factors that influence the mental health of young immigrants to Canada in order to inform mental health promotion strategies.

This research was guided by two main questions:

1. What empirical evidence exists regarding mental health in young people from migrant backgrounds living in Canada?
2. What are some of the influences on mental health and illness in this population?

### 2. Where did the research take place?

This study is a desk review of literature related to the impacts of young people's migration and settlement experiences on their mental health and illness in Canada. All research under review originated in Canada.

### 3. Who is this research about?

This research is about immigrant youth (aged 10-19) living in Canada.

### 4. How was the research done?

Researchers conducted a scoping review of literature related to their research questions. They used three academic databases to identify articles: Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL), PsychINFO, and MEDLINE PubMed. Studies used reported disaggregated, age-specific, data on the mental health of immigrant youth, were published between 2003-2013, and were in the English language.

A total of 14 articles met these criteria. The selected articles were organized according to age range, country of origin, mental illness, mental health influences, and research design; similar findings were then thematized and summarized.

## 5. What are the key findings?

This study found that there are several factors which influence the mental health of young people in Canada. These factors include:

- immigrant generation
- length of stay and age at migration
- country of origin and level of economic development in country of origin
- place of resettlement and urban residence
- parental ability to speak one of Canada's official languages
- household income
- family relationships
- school and neighbourhood environment
- experiences of harassment and racism
- disconnection and displacement
- sex

This study found that the majority of research about the mental health of immigrant youth in Canada used survey methods, which has limitations for understanding young people's mental health experiences in part because it was collected from their parents. Moreover, the scales used to measure youth mental health and illness may not connect with youth experience and definitions. Therefore, future research should augment existing studies by qualitatively asking immigrant youth about their definitions, perceptions and experiences of mental health and illness. This research does not take into account the heterogeneity within the category of "immigrant". Future research should consider diversity within the population when trying to design appropriate interventions.

## 6. Why does this research matter for youth work?

Mental health is affected by a variety of factors that cut across individual, family, community and societal levels. Immigrant youth who are experiencing the most mental distress are first generation newcomers to Canada and those who migrate before the age of 6. It is also important to note that most of the reviewed research did not focus on gender-specific mental health differences. The researchers suggest that it may be useful to pilot gender-specific interventions. Immigrant youth mental health is greatly affected by their parents' post-settlement experiences. If parents face struggles with employment and integration their children will likely struggle too. Finally, racialized immigrant youth who have experiences of racism and discrimination are more likely to experience poor mental health, emotional problems, and physical aggression. It is important to create inclusive and anti-racist policies and practices to limit racist discrimination.



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